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MONTHLY REVIEW

AN INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST MAGAZINE

EUROPE'S CRISES

Daniel Singer

VOL. 46

THE HISTORY OF THE MARKET

Ellen Meiksins Wood

NORTH KOREA: ISSUES OF WAR & PEACE IN ASIA

Daniel B. Schirmer

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commemorates the 15th anniversary of the
Stalinist triumph, Roxanne Dunbar
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anti-racism movement, Sweden:
a model that never was, and more.*

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NOTES FROM THE EDITORS

In this space in the June issue we pointed out that the health-care "industry" in the United States is undergoing a very rapid process of concentration and centralization, a process that has been greatly stimulated by the Clinton administration's complicated and highly bureaucratized reform project. What has traditionally been a sphere controlled by individual private-practice physicians and local not-for-profit hospitals is well on the way to joining most of the rest of the economy in the domain of monopolistic corporate capital. The days when you could choose your own doctor and decide with him/her on the best treatment for what ails you will soon be a thing of the past. These decisions will be made by businessmen for the usual business reasons.

(Continued on inside back cover.)

ON THE FIFTEENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SANDINISTA TRIUMPH: INTERVIEW WITH A REVOLUTIONARY PRIEST

by JOSEPH E. MULLIGAN, S.J.

José Alvarez Lobo, O.P., came to Nicaragua in 1967 and began teaching in the Dominican high school in Chinandega. He was also superior of the Dominican community. "That school," he recalls, "was at the service of a privileged minority."

In 1968, the year of the Medellín conference of Latin American bishops, Fr. José and others began to get a deeper understanding of the reality of Nicaragua and started working in rural areas—"above all in those peasant communities which had been struggling for some years for land." He told of one area where a few rich families had displaced over 100 peasant families, who were left without any land to work.

"In this context we began to take a hard look at our educational work and to see how it was tied in with all that we were discovering. This created problems for us at all levels with politicians, with landowners, and with Church officials. After working for some years with Christian youth groups, workers, and above all with the peasant movement, we found that the rich began to pressure the bishop in order to rid themselves of these movements."

Fr. Joseph Mulligan, the Jesuit priest from Detroit who conducted this interview with Fr. José, has been working with the Christian base communities in Managua since 1986. His book, *The Nicaraguan Church and the Revolution*, was published by Sheed & Ward in 1991.

The pressure paid off. "First the bishop, *Monseñor* Manuel Salazar y Espinoza of León, prohibited me from celebrating Mass and preaching, and then in 1975 he had no qualms about supporting the government's decision to expel me from the country.

"Before that," he continued, "the people's movement had grown in Chinandega, and the *Frente Sandinista* had laid the groundwork of a movement among students, workers, and peasants to seize power in favor of the people. There was a growing conviction that the situation of injustice, exploitation, and misery had to be stopped. We came to the conclusion that there was only one way: consciousness-raising, organization, mobilization, and action in every area to take power from the privileged minority and put it at the service of the majority.

"The Church as such was not in agreement with these changes, even after Medellín. The bishop's decision to stop me from celebrating Mass and preaching was the result of a number of letters signed by the richest people of Chinandega—those who had in one way or another, in collusion with the National Guard and local land registrars, gotten control of the wealth and who were thus responsible for the landlessness and misery of the vast majority." Fr. José was struck by this reality the first time he visited one of the rural communities and found two babies dead of malnutrition. They had been taken to the hospital but had been refused care.

"The Church prohibited me from denouncing this reality," the priest continued. "But it allowed the rich and the powerful, who were leaders of the *curso* and charismatic movements, to continue in their ways, because they had great influence with the bishops. In my case the bishop did not even call me in to discuss what had been said about me. He simply told me to preach love rather than hate. But 'preaching hatred' was identified with telling the rich that they had to be converted, to change their attitude, to share goods with others and not monopolize everything."

When I asked Fr. José whether the attitude of the bishop of León—an attitude of alliance with the rich—was shared by other bishops, he said that it was, noting that the wealthy landowners of Chinandega had close family ties with the rich in other dioceses. Thus it was not surprising that the bishops forbade the use of a publication called *Cristo Campesino* (“Christ the Peasant”), which tried to help the delegates of the Word to relate the demands of the gospel to the reality of Nicaragua. The final issue, Fr. José explained, dealt with the problem of malnutrition in relation to land ownership, calling for a more just distribution of land. “The bishops’ attitude explains why those of us who felt that the causes of the people’s suffering must be eliminated felt marginalized and avoided in the Church.”

Fr. José identified the bishops’ relations with the rich as the main factor in their opposition to the revolution. “In Nicaragua,” he said, “there was a project to change the kind of society into a more just one; but those who had power in the old society naturally resisted the new. The Church hierarchy looked to them as a source of its power.”

When I asked Fr. José what impressed him and Fr. Gaspar García Laviana (a Spanish priest who joined the Sandinista armed insurrection and was killed in combat in December 1978, just seven months before the victory over the Somoza dictatorship) about the Sandinista revolutionaries, he said that it was their dedication to the liberation of the poor. “Many of them were young people who had discovered the message of Christianity just as we had: working in reflection groups, analyzing the reality of Nicaragua. We already knew each other well. Some were graduates of our schools who would say: we must put into practice what we learned and discussed in class. Work with the *Frente* always challenged us to go further, to give more, to be more generous and more dedicated. In those days we spoke of faith and love which sought to be effective.” He added, however, that the Christian must always look beyond any revolutionary achievement, since the Kingdom of God is never fully attained in a given situation.

Fr. José explained how he first got into contact with the *Frente*. "They asked us about the problems we and our people were facing and how we thought they could be resolved, and they were interested in knowing which members of the community might want to take a further step in the struggle. At the same time Christian groups around the country were coming to a better understanding of what was needed, so the Sandinista option struck us as something natural, not superimposed on us. The Sandinistas were like prophets to us, challenging our timidity and our tendency to be calculating and at the same time announcing the possibility of a new society.

"So we started to put them up in our houses, pass messages along for them, drive them from one place to another, etc. Some participated directly in the struggle. We had to defend these people who were working for change, since the National Guard would have slaughtered them like a madman with a machine-gun in a schoolyard."

I asked Fr. José how he and others viewed the pronouncements of the hierarchy during that time, which were critical of the regime's abuses but which were also fraught with caution about "foreign ideologies" and with condemnations of violence "no matter where it might come from." He said that the people felt "a certain degree of happiness" but that this was tempered by their realization of the limited effectiveness of verbal pronouncements. "The people understood perfectly that their problems would not be solved by words. But at least those words could contribute to the weakening of the power of the dictatorship, although Somoza did not have much fear of pronouncements."

Fr. José pointed out that the bishops did not try to give voice to the demands of the people for economic justice. "Rather, the bishops expressed the interests of those who were closest to them, those who wanted to channel the bishops' statements toward change but a traditional kind of change. They wanted to get Somoza out, but they did not want to have those people in power who could really solve the people's

problems. The bishops' declarations did not contain any analysis of the real causes of the problems; they didn't even reflect the analysis of the bishops at the Medellín conference in 1968."

Fr. José added an anecdote that he considered instructive. "At the end of 1972," he recounted, "an earthquake practically destroyed Managua. Thousands had to move to other parts of the country. For instance, in Chinandega, where I was, the population grew from 26,000 to 58,000 due to the earthquake. There was an even greater increase in León. At a meeting of the pastoral council called by the bishop of León, the basic problem on the agenda was not how to help the refugees but how to prevent women from coming to communion wearing trousers! In fact, when some of the women refugees came to midnight Mass on December 24 wearing trousers, the bishop refused to give them communion. At the meeting of the pastoral council, a group of women from Chinandega asked the bishop whether it was a mortal sin for women to wear trousers, pointing out that mortal sin was the only obstacle to receiving communion. That was the last meeting of the pastoral council! All of this goes to show what the real concerns of our Church leaders were in the face of the people's real problems. To talk about the people's hunger was considered communist."

After his expulsion from Nicaragua in 1975, Fr. José lived in Costa Rica, "working as a priest and supporting the *Frente*" through solidarity activity. When Fr. José returned to Nicaragua after the 1979 triumph, he found that the bishop of León still refused to let him work as a priest in the diocese. The bishop expressed fear of reprisals that Fr. José, given his close ties to the *Frente* now in power, might take against him. This tendency "to turn the victim into the victimizer" still continued in the eighties, Fr. José said: "The bishops persecuted those Christians who were with the revolutionary process—expelling them from parishes, not giving priests faculties [license to practice], etc.—while they claimed to be the persecuted ones."

The priest accepted an invitation to work with the Sandinista government's Ministry of the Interior in planning educational programs for its personnel. "The cultural and technical development of these people seemed to me to be a top priority. We had been speaking in the Church for some time of the need to set priorities in our educational work, to concentrate our efforts in those areas which would be crucial for the future of the people. As I got to know the Ministry of the Interior, I saw that there were many in leadership positions in the police, the firefighters, the prison system, etc. who had just learned the basics of reading and writing. I felt it was much more important to educate these servants of the people than to prepare others who saw education as their ticket to class privileges and advantages in society, who would make use of the people's resources to prepare themselves to be able to leave the country or to work against the new society.

"Thus from within I got to know an area of Nicaraguan society which some were afraid of." While Fr. José described the *Frente Sandinista* as outstanding for the spirit of generosity, service, and sacrifice of its members, he was not blind to its faults and weaknesses. He said, however, that problems should be addressed and solved from within the revolutionary process.

I asked Fr. José for his estimate of how many priests and religious in Nicaragua were generally "with the process." He responded by distinguishing between the diocesan clergy and the religious. "The vast majority of the diocesan [secular] priests were not with the revolutionary process; among religious order priests, the number of those in favor would be higher. Another relevant factor was whether one is a native Nicaraguan or not. The majority of the native priests are part of a structure which is rather old—the parish structure. It is based on a kind of relationship with the hierarchy and the people which is not very much in agreement with the development of society, with the people's aspirations for dignity and democracy.

“Also, many of them have never left this country and don’t know other societies. They have not seen other ways of doing things that are more democratic, more participatory, more collective, and less vertical. Members of religious orders, on the other hand, usually have a broader experience and vision, although there are some notable exceptions to this.”

Looking to another factor, Fr. José agreed that members of religious orders enjoy a certain economic independence from the local bourgeoisie and a certain economic and juridical independence from the local bishop which the diocesan priests do not have.

“In the 1970s,” I stated, “your task and that of Fr. Gaspar and many other Christians was to struggle against the dictatorship. What was your Christian responsibility after the triumph of the revolution?” He responded: “The immorality we were facing in the 1980s had to do with unjust international relations, with the forces of aggression working to destroy the Nicaraguan revolution which was in the interests of the majority. We struggled to get them to let us live in peace.”

Defeat At The Polls

But the forces of aggression and counterrevolution did not let the Sandinista revolutionary government live in peace. By 1986 the United States was spending \$100 million a year to support the contras in their terrorist war against the Nicaraguan government (and against civilians and social projects identified with the revolution). This direct aggression, plus a damaging economic embargo, constituted the “low-intensity” warfare which was designed to undermine the government from within. Anxious for peace and hoping for an economic upswing, the people voted the Sandinistas out in 1990. The faults of some Sandinistas and the failings (partly induced by the aggression) of the revolutionary program shared some of the responsibility for the electoral defeat, but the dominant factor was the unrelenting and overwhelming violence of the U.S. and the Nicaraguan upper classes.

Reflecting on the elections, Fr. José noted: "The capitalist system, whether in its traditional or neoliberal form, dominates the consciousness of people, transferring its own sin onto the oppressed, giving them a strong feeling of culpability. It is a matter of projecting onto the poor the impression that they themselves are culpable for their poverty, because they are lazy, drunks, irresponsible, wasteful. But in reality the causes of the majority's poverty have to do with the socioeconomic structure, and more concretely with the rich who cast their nets everywhere to accumulate the wealth which the majority generate by their labor.

"In a similar way there was an attempt to blame the FSLN for its electoral defeat, even though the elections took place amidst threats and violence, with manipulation and lies, with the owners of the world confronting in an unequal and immoral way a small country, beating it down by war, embargo, and all kinds of pressures. What is also forgotten is the inconsistent attitude of the workers, the peasants, and the oppressed in general of the other countries of the world, especially of Central America, which sided with the cause of the powerful. Money and its agents work in a demoniacal way. For me there is no doubt that the capitalist system went all out to defeat the cause of the impoverished in Nicaragua and, as a consequence, in Central America. And in the midst of all this, the fall of socialism in Eastern Europe made the project of the Sandinista revolution more vulnerable."

I asked Fr. José what the last four years of neoliberal government have meant for Nicaragua and whether many of those who voted for Violeta Chamorro have been disillusioned. "The neoliberal government was conceived as a way to demolish, brick by brick, the Sandinista revolution and its achievements, replacing the national project with the interests of the owners of the world, and substituting the project of the rich minority for that of the poor majority. The Sandinista people's revolution represented an enormous effort toward the real democratization of Nicaraguan society. And it achieved this to the extent that it distributed wealth and land,

put education and health within the reach of all, geared bank credit toward the encouragement of production, made the people's participation possible and necessary in everything, and sought to put the will of the workers in first place in the various levels of national life.

"Little by little (not all at once, since the people are putting some difficulties in the way) the Chamorro government is seeking to destroy the democracy which has been constructed, because for her and for the national and foreign interests she represents, 'democracy' is something else. In the oligarchical conception, democracy means that only certain privileged minorities have rights. Thus she seeks to return the goods to a few hands, with health, education, and other basic services being only for those who can buy them. Similarly, the banks are not at the service of all but are rather a tool to restrict people's access to goods. Those in charge of the administration of justice join in this effort, and the winner in court is the one who has money to pay the lawyers and the corrupt judges.

"The neoliberal economic measures have resulted in a 60 percent unemployment rate and in making Nicaragua the most expensive Central American country. Although the armed struggle has ended, the socioeconomic conditions are pointing the country toward a possible social explosion. This has been held back until now by the people's tiredness and by the fact that they have been demobilized through the influence of the FSLN, which has constantly invited them to believe in the society of law; but no one knows how long it will continue like this. Of course, this demobilizing role taken up by the FSLN especially by the business sector and by those connected to the Sandinista representation in the National Assembly has exacted a great political cost, turning the *Frente* into an accomplice of the government and its anti-people policies.

"While it is true that many are disillusioned by the present government, the ability of the politicians to deceive the people (above all to seek scapegoats on which to cast off their faults) is such that we cannot reject the possibility that the

people will continue to be deceived in the next elections. Without any doubt, religion (especially the Catholic religion) is one of the elements which contribute most toward getting the majority to vote for those who exploit and lie to them. Its highest leaders have a belligerent attitude in favor of the political projects of the most recalcitrant right wing."

While meetings of the Christian base communities rarely include discussion of party politics, one senses that the communities remain basically supportive of the *Frente Sandinista*, hoping that the party will continue to promote the cause of the poor majority.

On the other hand, as Fr. José indicates, Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo has given some recent indications of his support for the ultra-right, which is at odds with the Chamorro administration because of the latter's willingness to work with the Sandinistas. In the debate as to whether there should be partial reforms of the Constitution or a whole new constitutional assembly, which would result in a new administration, most political groups favor partial reforms. The right-wing liberals and conservatives, however, have launched a campaign for a constitutional assembly, and the Cardinal expressed support for this position.

Furthermore, he joined in proposing a peace plan which leans toward denying the legitimacy of the Nicaraguan army. (The army is still called the Sandinista People's Army but will probably have a name change soon.) The plan presents the *recontras*, who have stepped up their military activity, and the army as two armed bands which must be reconciled; the army, which has responded to widespread appeals for law and order in the countryside, comes out looking like the side most responsible for the violence. (Pablo Antonio Cuadra, president of the new Catholic University, accused the army of committing genocide when it used some rockets in pursuing the *recontras*; not one person was killed.) The plan calls for the army to evacuate whole areas of the nation while the *recontras* disarm.

During the period of the Sandinista government, Obando's attitude was one of denying its legitimacy in various ways. He even went so far as to express support for the contra insurgency when the U.S. Congress was debating aid to the contras in 1986. Alejandro Bendaña quotes a former contra leader:

We had a great liking for Cardinal Obando. . . . He gave support to whomever deserved it, he was above all neutral, but he knew that our cause was just and that is why we could count on his support. (*Una Tragedia Campesina: Testimonios de la Resistancia*, [Managua, 1991], p. 192.)

The same contra leader observed that he and his fellow contras believed that "the Sandinista army was going to be abolished" as a result of the negotiations beginning in 1988 and that "we were going to be the army." (ibid., p. 188)

"Of course, the U.S. embassy constantly intervenes in the destiny of Nicaragua, tending to support the interests of the Nicaraguans who have moved to the States and become U.S. citizens. [These, many of whom are *Somocistas*, are demanding restitution of the property they lost in the Sandinista land reform; many, not all, have gotten their property back.] The embassy also supports the policies forced on Nicaragua by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, institutions which do not appear likely to be converted to the cause of the poor."

Fr. José also criticizes the poor for losing confidence in themselves and in their own capacity to struggle, accepting the "project of the powerful," allowing themselves to be disorganized and "reduced to begging from the heartless First World" which, far from saving them, only guarantees their oppression. These have fallen away from the God who empowers the poor to struggle for their own liberation.

"What are the challenges now for the Nicaraguan people and for the FSLN?" I asked. The challenges "have to do with the people's problems and their causes," he answered, citing the Latin American bishops' conference (in Medellín, Colom-

bia in 1968) in its emphasis on the need for consciousness-raising and organizing. "There is no use sitting on the side of the road weeping over what has been lost," he said. "We must live according to the basic truth that 'only the people can save the people' and also according to Paolo Freire's statement that 'no one can liberate anyone, and no one can liberate himself/herself alone.'"

"Consciousness-raising, organizing, and people's mobilization are not ends in themselves but rather necessary steps toward demanding a new national and world order in which the interests of the majority will be prioritized and promoted. This means that for the people to gain power they must begin to walk again. Today's problems can be overcome only by decisive and organized action by the poor and by those who identify with their cause. This is facilitated by the fact that the stuff of consciousness-raising, i.e., the suffering of the majority, is seen everywhere; it is also clear everywhere that salvation will not come from the rulers.

"This work of consciousness-raising, organizing, and mobilizing is the challenge for the FSLN; it must offer the people a program of action which shows its commitment to confront the problems of the impoverished majority. Once again it must hear the cry of the poor, making their cause its own, walking once again with them, and ready to suffer martyrdom if necessary in the struggle."

During the 1980s Fr. José taught members of the Sandinista Ministry of the Interior, as he mentioned. Now he works in an agricultural school in the south of Nicaragua, training students from poor families. "The bourgeoisie and the clergy who serve their interests want us to leave, since they consider us obstacles to their projects of exploitation and monopolization. As a militant of the FSLN, I want to bring faith and hope to those who want liberation. Even though the Catholic hierarchy has stopped us from exercising our ministry, we feel that our presence encourages others to keep struggling.

"There will always be needs, and so there is no other perspective than action and struggle. My hope is that the union of the poor and of those who identify with their cause may be consolidated. As a believer I hope to continue uniting my efforts with those who, although they may not have explicit faith, long for a just and fraternal world and sacrifice themselves for that. That's why I am a Sandinista militant, because in the *Frente* I find myself among those who truly seek the liberation of the impoverished of Nicaragua.

"It is true that some Sandinistas have become corrupt or betrayed the cause, but that is also true among Christians (including their leaders) and does not stop me from following Jesus. I continue trying to be a Sandinista, because I believe that their cause is still the cause of the poor and that their defeat is the defeat of the hopes of the oppressed. Fifteen years after the victory over Somoza, we must regroup our forces, be united, and take up the needs of the people as our program of action, working with the people so that tomorrow may be better than today. I hope, in humility, to have the strength to make my contribution to that cause."

The France viewed by [Amer]Indian visitors in the second half of the sixteenth century was a place of violent turmoil and great inequities. By 1580, some 800,000 people had died in religious wars and famine. French philosopher Michel de Montaigne captured the situation in an essay describing a 1562 discussion between young Charles IX (son of Henry II) and three Tupinambás visiting Rouen. Asked what they thought of Rouen and its people the Tupinambás said they had noticed that there were. . . "men full and gorged with all sorts of good things, and that [others] were beggars at their doors, emaciated with hunger and poverty, and they thought it strange that these needy halves could endure such injustice."—*World Monitor*, November 1992.

FROM OPPORTUNITY TO IMPERATIVE: THE HISTORY OF THE MARKET

by ELLEN MEIKSINS WOOD

Just about every definition of the “market” in the dictionary connotes an *opportunity*: as a concrete locale or institution, a market is a place where opportunities exist to buy and sell; as an abstraction, a market is the possibility of sale. Goods “find a market,” and we say there is a market for a service or commodity when there is a demand for it, which means it can and will be sold. Markets are *opened* to those who want to sell. The market represents “conditions as regards, opportunity for, buying and selling” (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary*). The market implies *offering* and *choice*.

What then are market *forces*? Doesn’t force imply coercion? In the conventional language of capitalist ideology, the market implies not compulsion but freedom. At the same time, this freedom is guaranteed by certain regulatory mechanisms which ensure a rational economy, where supply meets demand, putting on offer commodities and services that people will freely choose. These mechanisms are the impersonal “forces” of the market, and if they are in any way coercive, it is simply in the sense that they compel economic actors to act “rationally” so as to maximize choice and opportunity.

All this implies that capitalism, the ultimate “market society,” is the optimal condition of opportunity and choice.

Ellen Meiksins Wood teaches political science at York University, in Ontario, Canada. Her forthcoming book, *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism*, is due out this winter.

More goods and services are on offer, more people are more free to sell and profit from them, and more people are more free to choose among and buy them.

So what is wrong with this picture? A socialist is likely to tell you that the major missing ingredient is the commodification of labor power and class exploitation. So far so good. But what may not always be so clear, even in socialist accounts of the market, is that the distinctive and dominant characteristic of the capitalist market is not opportunity or choice but, on the contrary, compulsion. Material life and social reproduction in capitalism are universally mediated by the market, so that all individuals must in one way or another enter into market relations in order to gain access to the means of life; and the dictates of the capitalist market—its imperatives of competition, accumulation, profit maximization, and increasing labor productivity—regulate not only all economic transactions but social relations in general. As relations among human beings are mediated by the process of commodity exchange, social relations among people appear as relations among things, the “fetishism of commodities” in Marx’s famous formula.

Some readers are likely to object here that this is something every socialist, or at least every Marxist, knows; but I have my doubts. In what follows, I shall argue that most historical accounts of capitalism, both right and left, have tended to lose sight of its historical specificity, the peculiarity of the capitalist market as a compulsion rather than an opportunity. I think it follows that our understanding of capitalism today, and of the political possibilities available to a socialist opposition, will be affected by how we understand its history, the particular ways in which it represents a historic rupture with earlier social forms, and what this tells us about the specificities of the capitalist market.

I

Far from recognizing that the market became capitalist when it became *compulsory*, most historical accounts suggest

that capitalism emerged when the market was *liberated* from age-old constraints and when, for one reason or another, *opportunities* for trade expanded. In these accounts, capitalism represents not so much a radical qualitative break from earlier forms as a massive quantitative increase, an expansion of markets, and a growing commercialization of economic life. The traditional account—which appears in classical political economy, Enlightenment conceptions of progress, and many more modern histories—goes something like this:

With or without a natural inclination to “truck, barter and exchange” (in Adam Smith’s famous phrase), rationally self-interested individuals have been engaging in acts of exchange since the dawn of history. These acts became increasingly specialized with an evolving division of labor, which was also accompanied by technical improvements in the instruments of production (improvements in productivity, in many of these explanations, may in fact have been the primary purpose of the increasingly specialized division of labor, so that there tends to be a close connection between these accounts of commercial development and a kind of technological determinism). And capitalism—or “commercial society,” the highest stage of progress—represents a maturation of age-old commercial practices and their liberation from political and cultural constraints.

But only in the West, the story goes, were these constraints comprehensively and decisively lifted. In the ancient Mediterranean, “commercial society” was already fairly well established, but its further evolution was interrupted by an unnatural break—the hiatus of feudalism, and several “dark” centuries during which economic life was again fettered by irrationalism and the political parasitism of landlordly power. The classic explanation of this interruption invokes “barbarian” invasions of the Roman Empire, but a later and very influential version of this model was elaborated, from the 1890s through the 1920s, by the Belgian historian Henri Pirenne, who situated the rupture of the Mediterranean commercial civilization rather later, in the Muslim invasion which,

he argued, suppressed the old commercial system by closing off the Mediterranean trade routes between East and West.¹ A growing "economy of exchange," led by a professional class of merchants, was replaced by an "economy of consumption," the rentier economy of the feudal aristocracy.

But eventually, according to both Pirenne and his predecessors, commerce revived with the growth of cities and the liberation of merchants. This time, however, there emerged cities with a distinctive and unprecedented autonomy, cities devoted to trade and dominated by an autonomous burgher class which was to free itself once and for all from the fetters of the old cultural constraints and political parasitism. This liberation of the urban economy, of commercial activity and mercantile rationality (accompanied by the inevitable improvements in techniques of production which evidently follow from the emancipation of trade), was apparently enough to account for the rise of modern capitalism.

There have been other refinements of the old "commercialization" model, from Weber to Braudel.² There have also been frontal attacks on the "commercialization model" in general and the Pirenne thesis in particular (now generally out of favor). The most influential and currently more or less hegemonic of these has been the demographic model, which attributes European economic development to certain autonomous cycles of population growth and decline. But however vehemently the old model has been challenged, its fundamental presuppositions seem to have remained intact. In one way or another, whether by processes of urbanization and growing trade or by the cyclical patterns of demographic growth, the transition to capitalism in all these explanations is a response to the universal and transhistorical laws of the market, the laws of supply and demand.³

There is, of course, a major paradox here. The conception of the market as an arena of choice, and "commercial society" as the perfection of freedom, has tended to be associated with a theory of history in which modern capitalism is the outcome of an almost natural process, following certain

universal, transhistorical, and immutable laws. The operation of these laws can, at least temporarily, be obstructed, but not without great cost. And its end-product, the “free” market, is an impersonal mechanism, which can to some extent be controlled and regulated, but which cannot finally be thwarted without all the dangers—and the futility—involved in any attempt to violate the laws of nature.

II

All these explanations have in common certain assumptions about the continuity of trade and markets, from their earliest manifestations in primitive acts of exchange to their maturity in modern industrial capitalism. The age-old practice of commercial profit-taking in the form of “buying cheap and selling dear” is not, in these models, fundamentally different from capitalist exchange and accumulation through the appropriation of surplus value. Certainly there was a major shift from feudalism to capitalism, but the transformation was not in the nature of trade and markets themselves. The change was rather in what happened to the forces and institutions—political, legal, cultural, ideological as well as technological—that had impeded the natural evolution of trade and the maturation of markets.

If anything, in these models it is *feudalism* that represents the real historic rupture; and while the resumption of commercial development, beginning in the interstices of feudalism and then breaking through its constraints, is certainly treated as a major change in the history of Europe, it appears as something like a course-correction in a historical process that was temporarily—if drastically and for a rather long time—deflected. These assumptions tend to have another important corollary, namely that towns and trade were by nature antithetical to feudalism, so that their growth, however it came about, undermined the foundations of the feudal system.

But if feudalism, according to these explanations, had derailed the progress of commercial society, the intrinsic logic

of the market never significantly changed. From the beginning, it involved rationally self-interested individuals maximizing their utilities by selling goods for a profit whenever the opportunity presented itself. More particularly, it involved an increasing division of labour and specialization, requiring ever more elaborate networks of trade, and, above all, ever improving productive techniques, to cut costs in order to enhance commercial profits. This logic could in various ways be suppressed. But in principle, the logic of the market remained always the same, always an opportunity to be taken whenever possible, always conducive to economic growth and the improvement of productive forces, always bound eventually to produce industrial capitalism if left free to work out its natural logic.

There is no acknowledgement here of imperatives specific to capitalism, of the specific ways in which the market operates in capitalism, of its specific laws of motion which uniquely *compel* people to enter the market and *compel* producers to produce “efficiently” by improving labor productivity—the laws of competition, profit maximization, and capital accumulation. It follows that there is, according to these models, no need to explain the specific social property relations and the specific mode of exploitation that determine these specific laws of motion. There is, in fact, no need really to explain the emergence of capitalism, because it is assumed to exist, at least in embryo, from the dawn of history, if not at the very core of human nature and human rationality. People, given the chance (and when not impeded by institutional or cultural inhibitions), have always behaved according to the rules of capitalist rationality, pursuing profit and in its pursuit seeking ways to improve labor productivity, so that history has proceeded by the laws of capitalist development, in a process of economic growth sustained by developing productive forces—albeit with some major interruptions. If the emergence of a mature capitalist economy requires explanation at all, it is only an explanation of the barriers that have stood in

the way of its development, and of the process by which those barriers were lifted.

III

One notable exception to the rule was the economic historian and anthropologist Karl Polanyi. In his classic work, *The Great Transformation* (published first in 1944) and in other works, his principal message was that the motive of individual profit associated with market exchange was never until the modern age the dominant principle of economic life, and that even where markets were well developed, a sharp distinction must be made between societies with markets, such as have existed throughout recorded history, and a “market society.” In all earlier societies, “economic” relations and practices were “embedded” or submerged in non-economic social relationships—various kinds of kinship, communal, religious, and political relationships. There have been other motives driving economic activity than the purely “economic” motives of profit and material gain—the achievement of status and prestige, or the maintenance of communal solidarity—and there have been other ways of organizing economic life than through the mechanisms of market exchange; in particular what he calls the principles of “reciprocity” and “redistribution.”

Only in modern “market society,” Polanyi argued, is there a distinct “economic” motive, distinct economic institutions and relations, separated out from non-economic relations; and because human beings and nature—in the form of labor and land—are treated, however fictitiously, as commodities in a self-regulating system of markets driven by the price mechanism, society itself becomes an “adjunct” of the market. A market *economy* can exist only in a market *society*, that is, a society where, instead of an economy embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economy.

Polanyi directly challenged Adam Smith’s assumptions about “economic man” and his natural “propensity to truck, barter, and exchange,” arguing that this “propensity” had

never before Smith's own time played the dominant role he assigned to it, and that it did not *regulate* the economy until a century later. Where markets did exist in pre-market societies, even where they were extensive and important, they remained a subordinate feature of economic life, dominated by other principles of economic behavior. Not only that, these markets, even in the most wide-ranging and complex commercial systems, operated according to a logic quite distinct from that of the modern capitalist market.

In particular, he argued, neither the local markets nor the long-distance trade characteristic of pre-capitalist economies were essentially competitive. External trade was simply "carrying." Here, the merchant's job was to move goods from one market to another, while in local trade, commercial activity was strictly regulated and exclusive. In general, competition was deliberately eliminated because it tended to disorganize trade.

Let me clarify some points here, which may not be entirely clear in Polanyi's account. Take the example of long-distance trade, the particular form of economic activity that defined the great commercial centers which, according to all versions of the commercialization model, are supposed to have been the precursors of capitalism. This kind of trade took the form of "commercial arbitrage between separate markets."⁴ Buying cheap in one market and selling dear in another was the operative principle here, not competition within a single, integrated market. If there was competition, it did not take the form of competitive and cost-effective production; and the economy was certainly not driven by competition. Essentially "extra-economic" conditions, such as domination of the seas and other transport routes, or highly developed financial institutions and instruments of arbitrage, were the key to commercial advantage. So this kind of trade, largely in luxury goods for a fairly limited market, did not in itself carry an impulse to improving productivity. The main vocation of the large merchant was circulation rather than production. And even when a major commercial center like Florence

developed domestic production, in addition to its role in servicing external mercantile activity, the basic logic of economic transactions was not essentially different. For the merchant, it was still a matter of limited production for a luxury market and a recycling of wealth in the process of circulation, rather than the creation of value in production and appropriation by maximizing surplus value in the capitalist manner.

Polanyi points out that only internal, national markets—a very late development, much resisted by local merchants and autonomous towns in the most advanced commercial centers of Europe—were to be conducted according to competitive principles. But even internal markets within early modern European nation states were for some time simply a loose collection of separate municipal markets, joined by a carrying trade hardly different in principle from long-distance, overseas commerce. Nor was an integrated internal market a direct descendant of, or a natural evolution from, the local or long-distance trade which preceded it. It was, Polanyi argues, a product of state intervention—and even then, in an economy still largely based on production by self-sufficient peasant households laboring for subsistence, state regulation continued to prevail over competitive principles.

I intend to come back to the question of the internal, competitive market and the conditions in which it emerged. For the moment, I just want to emphasize what is particularly important in Polanyi's account of the market in history. He was not, of course, alone in noting the secondary role of the market in pre-capitalist societies. Any competent economic historian or anthropologist is bound to acknowledge the various non-market principles of economic behavior that operated in such societies, from the most "primitive" and egalitarian to the most elaborate, stratified, and exploitative "high" civilizations. And other economic historians (though perhaps not as many as one might imagine) have taken note of certain changes in the principles of trade. But Polanyi's account is particularly notable for its striking delineation of the rupture between "market society" and the non-market societies which

preceded it, even societies with markets, not only the differences between their economic logics but the social dislocations which that transformation brought about. So disruptive was the system of self-regulating markets, he insists, not only to social relations but to the human psyche, so awful its effects on human lives, that the history of its implantation had to be at the same time the history of protection from its ravages, the “protective countermoves,” particularly by means of state intervention, without which “human society would have been annihilated.”⁵

Polanyi’s argument in many ways represents a dramatic departure from accounts of economic development which stress the (more or less benign) continuities between ancient commerce and the modern capitalist economy even when they insist on the antagonism between “commercial” or capitalist principles and the economic (or anti-economic) logic of feudalism. But in some important respects, his account retains significant affinities with more conventional economic histories.

There is, first, more than a little technological determinism in his argument. The main theme of Polanyi’s historical account is how the Industrial Revolution brought about a market society, how, in a commercial society, the invention of complex machines made it necessary to convert “the natural and human substance of society into commodities.”⁶ “Since elaborate machines are expensive,” he argues, “they do not pay unless large amounts of goods are produced.” And the assurance of uninterrupted production required to achieve the necessary scale of production means that, for the merchant, “all factors involved must be on sale.”⁷ The ultimate and most disastrous step in creating the necessary conditions—that is, creating the market society originally required by complex machine production—is the transformation of labor into a commodified “factor.”

The sequence of causation here is significant. The Industrial Revolution was “merely the beginning” of an “extreme and radical” revolution which utterly transformed society by

commodifying humanity and nature.⁸ At its heart was “an almost miraculous improvement in the tools of production”⁹; and, while it brought about a transformation of society, it was itself the culmination of earlier improvements in productivity, both in techniques and in the organization of land-use, notably enclosures in England. Although Polanyi takes issue with the belief in “spontaneous progress,” he never for a moment seems to doubt the inevitability of such improvements, at least in the context of Western commercial society, with its “free institutions,” especially its free urban communes, and the expansion of trade—“the Western European trend of economic progress.”¹⁰

The main outlines of Polanyi’s historical narrative, then, are in some respects not so very different from less critical versions of the commercialization model: the expansion of markets goes hand-in-hand with technological progress to produce modern industrial capitalism. And although the process culminates in England, it is a general European process. For that matter, it appears that the process which led from commercialization to industrialization to “market society” may after all have been a more or less natural development in an increasingly commercialized world, a development completed only in Europe simply because certain non-economic obstacles did not here block its path. As a student of Polanyi’s has explained in an account of Polanyi’s lectures on “General Economic History” in the pages of *Monthly Review*, Polanyi argued that, in contrast to an equally commercialized East, Western European feudalism was not characterized by strong bonds of kinship, clan, and tribe, so that “when feudal ties weakened and disappeared, there was little to stand in the way of domination by market forces.” And while government intervention was required to create “factor markets,” “the developing market economy helped to destroy feudal economic and political institutions.”¹¹

What fails to emerge from all this is an appreciation of the ways in which a radical transformation of social relations *preceded* industrialization, creating a historically unique im-

perative to improve the forces of production. To say this is not just to accuse Polanyi of putting the cart before the horse. The more fundamental point is that his order of causation suggests a failure to treat the capitalist market itself as a specific social form. In fact, for all his insistence on the social consequences of the modern market, and the ways in which society has been submerged in the market economy, especially with the commodification of labor, Polanyi never actually treats the market itself as a social relation—as distinct from an impersonal mechanism which imposes itself on social relations. The specific imperatives of the capitalist market—the pressures of accumulation and increasing labor productivity—are then treated not as the product of specific social relations but as a result of (at least in Europe, more or less inevitable?) technological improvement.

I am suggesting, instead, that a capitalist dynamic rooted in a new form of social property relations both chronologically and causally preceded industrialization. In fact, a kind of “market society”—a society in which producers were market-dependent, dependent on the market for access to the means of life, labor, and self-reproduction, and subject to market imperatives—was not the result of industrialization but its primary cause. Only a transformation in social property relations which compelled people to produce competitively (and not just to buy cheap and sell dear), a transformation which made access to the means of production dependent on the market, can explain the dramatic revolutionizing of productive forces uniquely characteristic of modern capitalism.

It follows that the rise of capitalism cannot be explained as the *outcome* of technical improvements, or even “the Western European trend of economic progress,” or any other transhistorical mechanism. It also follows that the specific transformation of social property relations which *set in train* a historically unique “progress” of productive forces cannot be taken for granted and still needs to be explained.

IV

The issue here is not just a question of disagreements about the particular historical process which created capitalism. How we understand its history has a lot to do with how we understand the thing itself. The old models of capitalist development were a paradoxical blend of transhistorical determinism and “free” market voluntarism, in which the capitalist market was both an immutable natural law and the perfection of human choice and freedom. The antithesis of such models would be a conception of the capitalist market that fully acknowledges its imperatives and compulsions, while recognizing that these imperatives themselves are rooted not in some transhistorical natural law but in historically specific social relations, constituted by human agency and accessible to change. This is the kind of conception we might expect to find in Marxism. So where has Marxism figured in these historical debates? What have Marxist historians had to say about the history of the market? The answer is that there has been as much disagreement among Marxists as between them and bourgeois historians. Many Marxists (not least Marx himself in his earlier writings¹²) have been no less wedded than anyone else to the old commercialization model, often, perhaps, with a stronger dose of technological determinism. Others have been very critical of that model, though even here, strong residues remain. The debate is still in progress, and there is still much work to be done.

The single most important debate among Marxists on the relevant questions is the so-called “Transition Debate” sparked off by an exchange between Paul Sweezy and Maurice Dobb in *Science and Society* in the early 1950s.¹³ Among the main themes of the debate was the role of towns and trade in the transition, and particularly whether trade, especially the growth of long-distance East-West trade in the manner suggested by Pirenne, was the solvent of feudalism—in other words, whether the “prime mover” was external to the primary relations of feudalism—or whether the causes of that dissolu-

tion and the rise of capitalism must be found within those relations, the relations between lords and peasants.

Sweezy argued that feudalism, for all its inefficiencies and instabilities, was intrinsically tenacious and resistant to change, and that the main moving force in its dissolution had to come from outside. The feudal system could tolerate, and indeed required, a certain amount of trade; but with the establishment of localized urban trading and transshipment centers based on long-distance trade (about which Sweezy cited the authority of Henri Pirenne), a process was set in train which encouraged the growth of production for exchange, in tension with the feudal principle of production for use. But *this by itself was not enough to bring about capitalism*. Sweezy here made the important point that, while “We usually think of a transition from one social system to another as a process in which the two systems directly confront each other and fight it out for supremacy,” it would be a “serious error” to think of the transition from feudalism to capitalism in these terms.¹⁴

Sweezy did not propose to explain the second phase of the process, but he raised some critical questions about explanations offered by others. Two in particular stand out. First, he expressed skepticism about the plausibility of the view—following from the conventional interpretation of Marx’s theory of the “really revolutionary way” to industrial capitalism—that industrial capitalists rose from the ranks of petty producers, proposing instead that we should understand the “really revolutionary way” as a process in which the producer, instead of growing from petty producer into merchant and capitalist, “*starts out* as both a merchant and an employer of wage-labour,” in which capitalist enterprises are launched fully fledged instead of in a gradual process of growth out of the putting-out system.¹⁵ The second point was that even the generalization of commodity production could not account for the rise of capitalism and that highly developed commodity production—as, for instance, in medieval Italy or Flanders—did not necessarily produce capitalism.¹⁶

Sweezy's opponents, especially Maurice Dobb and Rodney Hilton, argued instead that trade in itself was not the solvent of feudalism; and Hilton in particular pointed out that Pirenne's argument had in any case been shown to be empirically flawed. They insisted that the "prime mover" in the transition which Sweezy was looking for was to be found in the relations between lords and peasants. Hilton in particular spelled out the ways in which money, trade, towns, and even the so-called "commercial revolution" were integral to the feudal system. This meant that, while there was undoubtedly a complex process in which they contributed to the transition, they could not be regarded as antithetical or inimical to feudalism and hence as its principal solvent.

Both Dobb and Hilton, in various ways, suggested that the dissolution of feudalism and the rise of capitalism resulted from the *liberation* of petty commodity production from the fetters of feudalism, with the help of class struggle between lords and peasants. Dobb, for example, argued that, while class struggle did not, "in any simple and direct way," give rise to feudalism, it did serve to

modify the dependence of the petty mode of production upon feudal overlordship and eventually to shake loose the small producer from feudal exploitation. It is then from the petty mode of production (in the degree to which it secures independence of action, and social differentiation in turn develops within it) that capitalism is born.¹⁷

Similarly, Hilton suggested that the pressures imposed by lords on peasants to transfer surplus labor were the root cause of improved production techniques and the basis for the growth of simple commodity production, while peasant resistance to those pressures was crucially important to the process of transition to capitalism, "the freeing of peasant and artisan economies for the development of commodity production and eventually the emergence of the capitalist entrepreneur."¹⁸

This summary is, of course, a gross abbreviation and simplification of the complex arguments offered by the participants in the debate; but it should be enough to raise some critical questions about the assumptions on which each side was operating. At first glance, it is Sweezy who seems to show the greatest affinity to the commercialization model, while his opponents seem to depart from it. But the issue is not so simple. On closer inspection, it is not at all clear that Dobb and Hilton are challenging all the basic assumptions of the commercialization model, and some of the questions raised by Sweezy go to the heart of the problems they leave unresolved. One point stands out in the arguments of Dobb and Hilton: the transition to capitalism is a matter of *liberating* or “shaking loose” an economic logic already present in simple commodity production. We are left with the overwhelming impression that, given the chance, the commodity-producing peasant (and artisan) will grow into a capitalist. The center of gravity in this argument may have shifted away from the city to the countryside, and class struggle has been given a new role; but how different are the assumptions underlying this argument from some of the main premises of the commercialization model? How far are we from the premise that the capitalist market is an *opportunity* rather than an imperative, and that what requires explanation in accounting for the rise of capitalism is the removal of obstacles, the breaking of fetters, not the creation of a wholly new economic logic?

Here the problems that troubled Sweezy in his confrontation with Dobb’s argument are very much to the point. First, the habit of treating transitions as a confrontation between two antithetical modes of production has far too often been an excuse for begging the question. As Sweezy suggested, while it may have a different meaning in the transition from capitalism to socialism, this habit is particularly problematic in dealing with the transition from feudalism to capitalism. As we have seen, the commercialization model and other related explanations effectively assume the existence of capitalism, or a capitalist rationality, in order to explain its emergence.

Feudalism is confronted by an already existing capitalism, at least in embryonic form, whose coming into being is never explained. The explanations offered by Marxists like Hilton and Dobb, while in many ways devastating to the commercialization model and to its assumptions about the antithesis of feudalism and commerce, have not entirely escaped from this trap, still in some important respects assuming the very thing that needs to be explained.

Nor do they offer an entirely convincing response to the question raised by Sweezy about the failure of advanced commercial centers such as those of Italy and Flanders. Here again there is a tendency to take capitalism for granted by simply explaining the *obstacles* which prevented these commercial cities from reaching maturity. The question posed about Flanders or Italy is not so much why and in what circumstances did capitalist imperatives impose themselves on economic actors, as they did in England, but rather why and in what ways were economic actors in the “failed” transitions unwilling or unable—not least for ideological or cultural reasons—to break away from their attachment to feudalism in order to create a new social form.¹⁹

There is also good reason for Sweezy’s skepticism about the “really revolutionary way.” This idea appears in Dobb particularly (though not exclusively) in the form of capitalist farmers rising from the ranks of the yeomanry. Again, the problem is that these rising yeomen tend to be depicted as more or less freely choosing the capitalist road, once released from feudal impediments, while capitalism is treated as a more or less organic growth out of petty commodity production—even if bourgeois revolutions may be required to remove the final obstacles. Yet there must be something more to account for the disposition of producers to behave like capitalists than simply their liberation from restraints or their growth from “middling” to large proprietors, and there is a qualitative difference between petty commodity production and capitalism which remains to be explained.

V

What the Transition Debate left unexplained—the question that was never really asked—was how and in what circumstances producers became subject to market *imperatives*. There has, however, been a further installment in the ongoing debate among Marxists. The historian Robert Brenner, taking up the challenge of the Transition Debate, has produced an important body of work which seeks to explain the transition from feudalism to capitalism without reading capitalist principles back into pre-capitalist societies and without assuming the very thing that needs to be explained. He also rejects the model of the transition from feudalism to capitalism in which two antagonistic modes of production confronted each other. There was no embryonic capitalism in the interstices of feudalism—either in pre-capitalist forms of trade or in petty commodity production treated as a kind of proto-capitalism. Brenner criticizes other accounts of the transition for neglecting the “internal logic and solidity” of pre-capitalist economies and proceeding as if economic actors will adopt capitalist strategies when given the chance—a criticism which would, though he never says it in so many words, presumably apply as much to the rising-petty-commodity-production theory as to the commercialization model. Brenner takes this insight further, however, not by looking for some external impetus to the dissolution of feudalism (in the context of certain property relations, for example, trade could and did lead to *tightening* rather than loosening pre-capitalist property forms) but by looking for a dynamic internal to feudalism which does not itself presuppose an already capitalist logic. Class struggle figures prominently in his argument, as it did in Dobb’s and Hilton’s, but here it is not a question of *liberating* an impulse toward capitalism. Instead, it is a matter of lords and peasants, in certain specific conditions peculiar to England, involuntarily setting in train a capitalist dynamic while acting to reproduce themselves *as they were*, creating a situation in which producers were subjected to market imperatives—not the *opportunity* to produce for the market and grow from petty

producers into capitalists but the *need* to specialize for the market and to produce competitively—simply in order to guarantee access to the means of subsistence.

There is no room to go into detail here.²⁰ It is enough to say that Brenner's explanation has to do with the very specific conditions of English property relations, in which an exceptionally large proportion of land was owned by landlords and worked by tenants whose conditions of tenure increasingly took the form of economic leases, in effect obliging them to compete not only in a market for consumers but in a market for access to land, and to produce competitively in order to pay economic rents. At the same time, landlords in England had been demilitarized before any other aristocracy in Europe, and the English state was uniquely centralized, without the "parcellization of sovereignty" characteristic of feudalism and its successor states. This meant that, although the state served the aristocracy as an instrument of order, the ruling class was unusually devoid of autonomous "extra-economic" powers, or what Brenner calls "politically constituted property," the kinds of independent political, juridical, and military powers by means of which exploiting classes in pre-capitalist societies—such as feudal lords—typically appropriated surplus labor. This distinctive landed class became increasingly dependent on the *productivity* of their tenants, rather than on exerting coercive power to squeeze more surplus out of them. As competitive "market forces" established themselves, less productive farmers went to the wall, and together with direct coercive intervention to evict them or to extinguish their customary rights, this accelerated the polarization of English rural society into larger landowners and a growing propertyless multitude. The famous "triad" of landlord, capitalist tenant, and wage laborer was the result, and with the growth of wage labor the pressures to improve labor productivity also increased. The same process created a highly productive agriculture capable of sustaining a large population not engaged in agricultural production, but also an increasing propertyless mass, which would constitute both

a large wage-labor force and a domestic market for cheap consumer goods—a type of market with no historical precedent. This is the background to the formation of English industrial capitalism.

Although Brenner has clearly been influenced by Dobb and Hilton, the difference between his argument and theirs should by now be clear. Again, the operative principle in his argument is compulsion or imperative, not opportunity. If, for example, the yeoman-farmer plays a role here, it is not as the bearer of an opportunity but as the subject of an imperative. Yeomen were typically the very kind of capitalist tenants who were subject to the competitive pressures of the English triad; and even owner-occupiers would be subject to those pressures once the competitive productivity of agrarian capitalism set the terms of economic survival. Both landlords and tenants came to depend on success in the market, as the former relied on the profits of the latter for their rents; and both had an interest in agricultural “improvement,” the enhancement of productivity by means of innovative land use and techniques, which often implied, among other things, enclosure—not to mention the exploitation of wage labor.

In one of the additions to the Transition Debate, another contributor inadvertently illustrates the difference between the market-as-opportunity model and the market as imperative—though perhaps in a way which a specialist like Hilton would have avoided. John Merrington, in his important article on the structural role of towns in feudalism, suggests that, although the transformation of feudal surplus labor into money rents did not in itself alter the fundamental nature of feudal relations, by helping to fix surplus labor to a constant magnitude it “stimulated the growth of independent commodity production.”²¹ This proposition seems to be based less on empirical evidence than on the presupposition that petty producers would choose to act like capitalists if given the chance. Brenner, in contrast, shows how *unfixed, arbitrary* rents, acting as economic rents responsive to market imperatives, stimulated the development of commodity produc-

tion, the improvement of productivity, and self-sustaining economic growth. Elsewhere, as in France, where peasants typically enjoyed possession of land at fixed and nominal rents, no such stimulus existed.

In a sense, Brenner has also answered Sweezy's question about the "really revolutionary way." The capitalist tenant in England was not just a petty producer who had grown into a capitalist. His specific relation to the means of production, the conditions in which he had access to land itself, made him from the start a capitalist, a producer subject to market imperatives and typically an employer of wage labor.

The contrast with France is illuminating. Here, the aristocracy long retained its hold on politically constituted property or "extra-economic" powers of exploitation; and when feudalism was replaced by absolutism, these powers were not replaced by purely economic exploitation or capitalist production. Instead, the French ruling class gained new extra-economic powers as the absolutist state created a vast apparatus of office by means of which a section of the propertied class could appropriate the surplus labor of peasants in the form of a tax. And even then, at the height of absolutism, France remained a confusing welter of competing jurisdictions, as nobility and municipal authorities clung to the remnants of their autonomous feudal powers, the residues of feudal "parcellized sovereignty." In these conditions, the preferred economic strategy was still to squeeze the peasants by extra-economic means rather than to encourage competitive production and "improvement." There was no impetus to capitalist development comparable to England's until England itself succeeded in imposing its competitive pressures on an international economy. This was to be the pattern of development in other capitalist societies too, as competitive pressures from outside, in an international system, compelled other states to encourage economic development.

It is worth noting, too, that the integrated national market which Polanyi described as the first kind of market to operate on competitive principles developed in England long

before anywhere else, while France had to await the Napoleonic era to remove internal barriers to trade. The important point about this is that the development of a competitive national market was a corollary, not a cause, of capitalism and "market society." The evolution of a unified and competitive national market reflected changes in the nature of the mode of exploitation and the nature of the state. So, for example, in France, the persistence of "extra-economic" powers of exploitation, not only in the form of state-office but also the remnants of old aristocratic jurisdictions or other corporate powers and privileges inherited from feudalism, meant that neither the state nor the economy was truly integrated. This corporate fragmentation of society was as much a part of absolutism as the centralized bureaucracy which dominates conventional stereotypes of the absolutist state. In England, where there was a clear separation between the political, coercive powers of the state and the exploitative powers of propertied classes which derived their wealth from purely "economic" forms of exploitation, the private economic powers of the ruling class did not detract from the political unity of the state, and there was both a truly centralized state and an integrated national economy.

VI

Brenner's argument, then, by showing how direct producers became subject to market imperatives, explains the context in which the very nature of trade and markets was transformed, acquiring an entirely new economic role and a new systemic logic. This happened long before industrialization and as a precondition to it. Market imperatives, in other words, imposed themselves on direct producers before the mass proletarianization of the work-force and, in fact, were a decisive factor in creating a mass proletariat, as "market forces," supported by direct coercion in the form of political and judicial intervention, created a propertyless majority.

But proletarianization, which meant the complete commodification of labor power, did confer new and more far-

reaching coercive powers on the market by creating a working class that was completely market-dependent and completely vulnerable to market disciplines, with no mediations and no alternative resources. Nor, of course, is it enough to say that both capital and labor were subject in their various ways to the impersonal forces of the market. The market itself became a major axis of class division between exploiters and exploited, between buyers and sellers of labor power, and a new coercive instrument for capital, the ultimate discipline in its control of labor.

The way in which “market society” established itself in the intervening period has been most vividly described by E.P. Thompson. In his work, the establishment of “market society” comes to life, not only as a process of proletarianization, particularly in his classic work, *The Making of the English Working Class*, but also in his writings on the earlier eighteenth century, as a living confrontation between “market society” and alternative values and practices. The implantation of “market society” also appears as a confrontation between classes, between those whose interests were expressed in the new political economy of the market, together with its philosophy of “improvement,” and those who struggled to contest them from a vantage point that put the right of subsistence before the imperatives of profit.

For those who have wondered why Thompson, after *The Making of the English Working Class*, moved back into the eighteenth century instead of forward beyond the 1830s to a fuller account of industrialization, the answer must be that he was trying to explain the establishment of *capitalism* as a social form, and not some neutral technical process called “industrialization.” He was particularly interested in the eighteenth century as the moment when the capitalist transformation of property relations was being consolidated and was playing itself out in the articulation of a new capitalist ideology more self-conscious and explicit than ever before. It was also a moment when the contestation of the new economic principles had not yet been submerged in a hegemonic ideology,

the political economy of the market, which would soon infiltrate even some of the most radical opposition to capitalism.

Thompson suggests that in eighteenth-century England the market was in fact the main arena of struggle. This was so for reasons very specific to this “transitory” moment in English history. On the one hand, this was a moment of “free” labor, subject neither to pre-capitalist, extra-economic forms of domination nor as yet, in general, to the new disciplines of the factory, so that people for a short time still controlled “their own immediate relations and modes of work.”²² On the other hand, “they had very little control over the market for their products or over the prices of raw materials or food.” This is why social protest was so often directed at the market. People (often women) opposed not only what they regarded as unjust prices but illegitimate and immoral market practices—practices designed to increase profit, which from the vantage point of “market society” and capitalist rationality seem perfectly normal today but which violated certain customary expectations about rights of access to the means of life.

In some of these protests, we can also see opposition to the transformation of the market from a visible and more or less transparent institution into an “invisible hand.” The market with which people had been most familiar was a physical place where people put commodities on offer for other people to buy, according to principles still to some extent governed by custom, communal regulation, expectations about the right to subsistence, and what Thompson famously called “the moral economy of the crowd.” Now it was becoming a mechanism beyond communal control, as the transparency of market transactions was supplanted by the mysteries of a “self-regulating” market, the price mechanism, and the subordination of all communal values to the imperatives of profit.

Thompson also shows how the new ideology of political economy, together with the new conceptions of property and the ethic of profit and “improvement” on which it was based, were increasingly enforced by state repression. The courts would put reasons of “improvement”—the proprietor’s right

to profit by increasing productivity—above customary use-rights or the right to subsistence. And the civil authority reacted more violently (especially in the wake of the French Revolution) to protest against unjust prices and market practices. Coercion by the state, in other words, was required to impose the coercion of the market.

VII

A lot still remains to be learned about the role of markets, cities, and trade in the history of capitalism; but even to acknowledge that capitalism was not an organic growth out of age-old forms of commerce, nor a result of technological development, and to recognize all the consequences of the social relations that constitute the capitalist market, has major implications.

I am convinced, for example, that various political programs of the left—from social democratic demands for a more “social” market in the context of capitalism, to somewhat more radical theories of “market socialism”—are still in some ways based on illusions about the nature of the market as a sphere of opportunity and choice, and a failure to consider the full consequences of treating the market as an economic regulator. I still remember—though the heady days of the Communist collapse already seem very distant—how idealistic democrats in Eastern Europe responded to warnings about the market from the Western left (at a time when there still seemed to be an anti-market left in the West and still some chance of dialogue between them and more progressive forces in the former Communist countries). When people warned that “the market” means not only supermarkets with lots of choice but mass unemployment and poverty, the reply would be, “Yes, of course, but that’s not what we mean by the market.” The idea was that you could pick and choose what you want from the self-regulating market. The market can act as a regulator of the economy just enough to guarantee some “rationality,” some correspondence between what people want and what is produced. The market can act as a signal, a

source of information, a form of communication between consumers and producers; and it can guarantee that useless or inefficient enterprises will shape up or fall. But we can dispense with its nastier side.

All this may seem as naive to many Eastern Europeans now as it did to some Western Marxists then; but it is not at all clear that many on the Western left today are any less inclined to think that the market as an economic regulator is amenable to that kind of choice between its beneficent disciplines and its more destructive consequences. It is difficult to explain in any other way the notion of “market socialism,” or even the less utopian social democratic conception of the “social market,” in which the market’s ravages can be controlled by state regulation and an enhancement of social rights.

I do not mean to say that the “social market” is no better than free market capitalism. Nor do I mean to suggest that certain institutions and practices associated with the market could not be adapted to a socialist economy. But it’s no good refusing to confront the implications of the one irreducible condition without which the market cannot act as an economic discipline: the commodification of labor power—a condition which places the strictest limits on the “socialization” of the market and its capacity to assume a human face.²³

The market today is still acting not only as an “impersonal” imperative but also as a direct instrument of class power manipulated by capital in its control of labor, not to mention as a medium of a new imperialism, in which advanced capitalist economies, with the help of the state, are imposing market “disciplines” on the Third World and on the “new democracies.” To avoid the ravages of market society will require greater transformations than Polanyi had in mind, but as a historically specific social form capitalism may also be more open than he imagined to contestation and another “great transformation.”

At this moment in the “long decline,” capitalists themselves—in their increasingly desperate demands for “flexibility”—seem closer than ever before to admitting that the

imperatives of the capitalist market will not allow them to prosper without depressing the conditions of workers and degrading the environment. In these circumstances, socialism may turn out to be less unrealistically utopian than is a "social" capitalism.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Henri Pirenne, *Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade* (Princeton, 1952).
2. I have argued that Max Weber falls into this category in my forthcoming book, *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge, late 1994 or early 1995).
3. See Robert Brenner, "Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe," in T.H. Aston and C.H.E. Philpin, eds., *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 10.
4. Eric Kerridge, *Trade and Banking in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 1988), p. 4.
5. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston, 1957), p. 76.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 42.7. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 40.9. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
11. Daniel R. Fusfeld, "The Market in History," MR 45, no. 1 (May 1993): 6.
12. For a discussion of the changes in Marx's conception of history and the development of capitalism, his changing views on a range of issues from the division of labor to bourgeois revolution, see George Comninel, *Rethinking the French Revolution: Marxism and the Revisionist Challenge* (London, 1987); and Robert Brenner, "Bourgeois Revolution and Transition to Capitalism," in A.L. Beier, et al., eds., *The First Modern Society* (Cambridge, 1989).
13. The whole debate, which brought in other major Marxist historians, was later published, with some additions, in ed. Rodney Hilton, ed., *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism* (London, 1976).
14. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 106-7.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
19. See, for example, Hilton in *Transition*, pp. 157-9.
20. Brenner's most important account of the transition can be found in *The Brenner Debate*.
21. Hilton, p. 179.
22. E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London and New York, 1991), p. 74.
23. For a discussion of this point, see David McNally, *Against the Market* (London, 1994).

SWEDEN: THE MODEL THAT NEVER WAS

by PETER COHEN

The articles on Swedish Social Democracy by Kenneth Hermele and David Vail in *Monthly Review* (March and October, 1993) are typical of a pervasive tendency to describe the political economy of Sweden as a special case. But the “Swedish model” is not qualitatively distinct from other manifestations of capitalism, and the role of the Swedish Social Democrats (SAP, *Socialdemokratiska Arbetarpartiet*) has not been qualitatively different from that of other Social Democratic parties in Western Europe.

The history of the SAP since the First World War is one of class collaboration, not of “a kind of social contract” or “negotiated class relationships,” whatever that may mean. Like all other European Social Democratic parties, the SAP not only accepts capitalism but defends it against any attempt at change. The party has always argued that what is good for Swedish corporations is good for the Swedish working class.

The SAP’s political difficulties stem largely from the fact that this argument is untenable, although it is currently fashionable in Sweden to pretend that the party’s main problem is the disappearance of the working class. Vail offers a variant of this claim, but his statement that highly educated white-collar workers now outnumber blue-collar workers is contradicted by the *Statistical Yearbook of Sweden* for 1994, which shows that of 4.5 million in “gainful employment” in 1990,

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1.98 million, or 44 percent, are classified as manual workers, while another 650,000 million are listed as low-grade white-collar workers.

The latter have not had more than three years education after secondary school, and include computer operators, child-care workers, janitors and others who can be regarded as part of the working class. If half of this group is included, together with 65 percent of the 1.3 million people who in 1990 were either unemployed, on long-term (six months to two years) sickness compensation or on some sort of disability pension, the working class population comprises about 2.7 million people.

Middle-grade white-collar workers amount to .74 million, and upper-grade (including managers) to 440,000, together accounting for about 1.2 million, or 26 percent of those gainfully employed. They are outnumbered 2.3:1 by the working class.

The Working Class Pays For Its Social Benefits

The improvement in the condition of a substantial portion of the Swedish working class over a relatively short period (1960-1985) can be traced to the same factors that generated the *Beveridge Report*, which was the basis for the family allowances and the state social insurance scheme developed in the United Kingdom during the 1940s. Lord Beveridge and his advisers understood that a higher standard of health care for workers means less "absenteeism," lower employee turnover and higher productivity, which means greater profits. The *Report* does not of course use the term "surplus value." Beveridge pointed out that social benefits can be financed out of the increase in profits/surplus value. The same social benefits also help to counteract the effects of pressure from the militant left for more fundamental changes in production relations, and the *Beveridge Report* is quite clear on this point.

However, maintaining a high level of social benefits under capitalism requires a sustained ability to realize the increment in surplus value generated by higher productivity,

which means that the system must show long-term growth in terms of sales and markets. The expansion of social benefits in Sweden from the late 1950's through the late 1970's was predicated on the assumption that the system would continue to grow, and that it would remain a capitalist system.

Since the SAP simultaneously accepts capitalism and claims to represent the working class, it is obliged to deny capitalism's fundamental contradictions. The party has therefore consistently refused to discuss the key question in production relations—who should own and manage the production system?

This denial was obvious at a very early stage and it helps to explain the eagerness with which Swedish capital has collaborated with the party. This is especially true because the Social Democrats have always been willing to take on the task of explaining that the party's basic premise naturally requires the working class to accept cutbacks—of all types—when corporate profits decline, and even when they don't.

Integration in the International Capitalist System

One of the main factors underlying the growth trend for national income in the OECD countries after 1945 was the intensified exploitation of workers in the so-called LDCs, in which Swedish capitalists participated ferociously.

From the 1960s onward, Sweden has been one of the world leaders in per-capita exports of capital. The SAP cooperates eagerly with Swedish capitalists in their efforts to maximize the return on investments in the neocolonies, particularly in Latin America, the Middle East, and southeast Asia, as does LO (*Landsorganisationen*), which is the Swedish equivalent of the British Trade Union Council and is intimately connected with the party.

Neither the SAP, LO, nor any other Social Democrat party or trade union in Western Europe has ever made any serious attempt to block exploitation of the LDCs.

Swedish post-war Social Democrat governments led Sweden to active participation in various imperialist organizations

and agreements, including the IMF, the IBRD, the OECD, and GATT. One of the SAP's main functions has been to persuade the Swedish working class that such activities are valuable contributions to world peace and prosperity.

Among other things, a Swedish SAP government endorsed the moratorium on loans to Chile after Allende's election and contributed to the special IBRD fund for financing loans to the Pinochet government after the coup in 1973. This was publicly motivated in Sweden by the claim that the poor and downtrodden in Chile would suffer even more unless help was provided to the Pinochet government, which the SAP said was admittedly authoritarian but was nevertheless trying to repair a shattered economy for the general good of all the Chileans.

Similar arguments were used throughout the 1970s to justify the SAP's refusal to support sanctions against South Africa. By coincidence, Swedish companies such as SKF and Atlas Copco had been operating for decades in the South African market.

The SAP's betrayal of the working class in other countries is not limited to the LDCs. One of the most flagrant examples occurred when the steelworkers in West Germany went on strike in the spring of 1983. The strike was timed to cut off supplies of steel to German automotive companies at a crucial time. These companies turned to Swedish steel companies for alternate supplies and secured them. The SAP and LO refused to call for sympathy strikes or to block deliveries of steel to Germany. The head of the union local at one of the major Swedish steelworks was asked about the total lack of solidarity with workers in Germany. He answered "Talk to LO and the Social Democrats in Stockholm."

The SAP and LO also remained silent throughout the Thatcher government's brutal attack on the coal miners in the United Kingdom.

A Capitalist Crisis is a Crisis for Social Democrats

Since the political fortunes of the SAP have always depended on its ability to deliver benefits to its working-class voter base, and this ability is in turn dependent on the continued stability and well-being of corporate Sweden, the party began to experience difficulties in the 1970s, when the capitalist system began to show signs of a global crisis. It is absolutely incomprehensible that anyone could attempt to discuss developments in Sweden over the past twenty years without reference to the general crisis of capitalism.

Before discussing these developments, several other aspects of the collaboration between the SAP and the capitalist class in Sweden and abroad are worth noting.

Staunch Anti-Communism

The Russian Revolution of 1917 was condemned in no uncertain terms by leading Social Democrats in Sweden and other countries. The threat posed by the Communist movement to the owners of capital was and is the cement in the alliance between the SAP and the Swedish capitalists.

Throughout the 1930s the SAP was openly hostile not only to Swedish Communists and the Soviet Union, but to anticapitalist movements throughout Europe, if they threatened to disrupt the sacred rights of property. Swedes who joined the International Brigade in Spain were guilty of a criminal act under Swedish law, although Swedes who volunteered for duty in the Finnish army led by the fascist General Mannerheim against the Soviet Union were regarded as heroes. Swedish relations with Nazi Germany remained extremely friendly during the 1930s, and representatives of the Swedish armed forces attended Hitler's fiftieth birthday celebration with the blessing of the Social Democratic government.

During the Second World War the SAP endorsed the alliance between Swedish and Nazi capitalists. The German war industry was heavily dependent on Sweden for supplies of

iron and other vital raw materials, as well as ball bearings and weapons technology. These supplies were forthcoming with the help of the Swedish government, which not only provided naval craft to protect shipments across the Baltic, but also allowed Swedish railways and airports to be used by German troops in transit to and from Norway and the eastern front.

A large number of Swedish Communists were interned in Swedish concentration camps during the war until after the battle of Stalingrad, when the SAP began to understand that the fascists were not going to win. Distribution of Communist newspapers through the post office or the public transportation system was prohibited. Very few German or Swedish Nazis were arrested or interned in Sweden between 1941 and 1945, and then only after Stalingrad. Swedish police and intelligence services continued their tradition of cordial relations with the Germans throughout the war.

The SAP also participated in the so-called Cold War. Among other things, the party channelled CIA funds to the Finnish social-democrat trade unions. The SAP Swedish government joined the trade boycott started by the United States against the Soviet Union, although it denied the fact until long afterward. It cooperated with the United States in serving as a communications center for projected nuclear strikes and ran a secret agency (IB) outside parliamentary supervision which collaborated closely with the CIA, Mossad, and the West German *Bundesdienst*. IB was under the immediate control of the SAP leadership. The two journalists who revealed its existence were immediately jailed. They were subsequently released when they requested pardons and promised never to misbehave again.

The above activities are seldom included in descriptions of the "Swedish model," but they show that the SAP has consistently served the interests of the international capitalist class.

The party's de facto alliance with the CIA was shown again in the mid-1970s during the abortive move toward socialism in Portugal. SAP representatives openly condemned

the Portuguese “Communist revolution” and actively supported Mario Soares, a Social Democrat who was described as the one man who could bring back law and order. The party had no objections to US naval operations off the Portuguese coast, and when Soares, the Portuguese capitalists, and the CIA joined forces to eliminate the threat to private property the SAP offered its fraternal congratulations.

Unemployment and Wage Restraint

As indicated above, the SAP is continuously faced with the problem of reconciling a basic contradiction—it must comply with the demands of the owners of the system and simultaneously satisfy its own working-class electoral base.

Although Sweden has a reputation for continuous full employment since 1945, the *Statistical Yearbook* shows a different picture. For example, as early as 1973 the number of persons outside the “normal labor market” amounted to just under 400,000 or almost 10 percent of the work force. Only about 130,000 were reported as openly unemployed. More than 200,000 had stopped looking for work or were working part-time, most of them women. About 50,000 were being retrained, about 25,000 were in underpaid jobs in state-run workshops for the occupationally disabled. Another 30,000 or so had temporary work in relief programs.

Although the public sector consumed 40 percent of Sweden’s industrial output by 1980, while exports accounted for 25 percent, it is revealing that calls for wage restraint from both SAP and the Swedish Employers’ Confederation (SAF, *Svenska Arbetsgivareföreningen*) never referred to the public sector as an economic motor. The export market was labelled the key to Sweden’s future, and wages had to be kept down in order to make Swedish companies more competitive.

An ingenious technique called the “solidarity wage policy” was devised by the SAP to help hold back wage increases. Vail refers to this fraud as evidence of the SAP’s “historic commitment to equality and solidarity.”

In the collective bargaining process, the employer and the union agree on the portion of profit that can be distributed to the workers. After deducting all payroll levies from this sum, the remainder is paid as wages. The lowest paid workers receive slightly higher percentage wage increases than the highest paid, who thus finance their comrades' wage increases. While this may appear to be an expression of solidarity in that the gap between the highest and lowest paid workers in a plant is slightly reduced, it does not explain why *all* the workers should not receive a larger share of the surplus value that they produce.

The "solidarity wage" does not affect the imbalance of income between workers and capitalists. It only redistributes wages between different groups of workers. It also makes the SAP look like a dedicated defender of the workers' interests.

Public Finances and the Capitalist Crisis

David Vail claims that, "the secular slowdown that hit Sweden with the first oil shock in 1973-1974 produced both a chronic fiscal crisis and increasing popular resistance to higher taxes." This mantra has been a staple of SAP and SAF propaganda since around 1977.

In the first place, the slowdown in the late 1970s was not caused by the "oil crisis." It was part of the general downward trend in growth rates throughout the capitalist system. In the second place, Sweden has not suffered from a fiscal crisis. The "crisis" was created by bookkeeping tricks, including the abandonment of a capital budget in the national accounts. While it was a bourgeois government that began to treat investment outlays as costs in the late 1970s, the practice of describing public finances as a disaster area has been continued by the SAP in order to justify wage restraint, Reagan-style tax reform and dismantling of the public sector, as well as what the party usually refers to as a "lack of room" for further reforms.

The SAP shadow Finance Minister, Göran Persson, is currently leading a chorus which repeats almost daily that the main task of the new government after the elections in Sep-

tember, 1994 will be to put the appalling state finances in order. The evidence for financial disaster is given as the ratio between gross national debt and GDP, which is said to be the highest in the OECD, Greece excepted.

However, in July, 1993 the OECD's own analysts pointed out that net *debt* in relation to GDP is the truest measure of the health of a nation's finances. And by this measure Sweden ranks third best, according to the OECD's own figures, as published in *The Economist* (July 10, 1993).

Persson is preparing the Swedish working class for policies which will be the same as those of the present bourgeois government. These policies involve a frontal assault on the public sector and social benefits, including drastic cuts in unemployment compensation.

It should be noted that Persson was in charge of the dismantling of the Swedish public education system that was started under the previous SAP government (1988-1991). This has opened the door to establishment of private schools on a large scale, and will inevitably result in the same catastrophic imbalance between public and private education that afflicts the United States and the United Kingdom.

The budget deficit is another component of the argument that the "Swedish model" generated a crisis in the state's finances. Kenneth Hermele is quite correct in his statement that the current budget deficit is traceable to a tax reform engineered by the SAP and the bourgeois parties in 1990. The Swedish Statistical Office (SCB) has recently published figures showing that around 90 percent of the current deficit stems from tax cuts in higher income brackets.

But the tax reform was not a "counterrevolution" (Hermele). It was a logical consequence of the SAP's predicament. As a defender of the capitalist system, the party is obliged to side with the bourgeoisie on the basic question of how the distribution of surplus value is to be modified in times of crisis.

Another interesting set of figures recently published by the SCB shows that the social insurance system has been

generating a substantial surplus, not a deficit, as Vail implies. For example, the net of total income and disbursements in 1983-1991 related to sickness benefits, occupational-related illness, public pensions, disability pensions, and unemployment insurance amounted to an annual surplus of SEK 17.9-41.9 billion, or about 9-20 percent of the current State borrowing requirement.

The figure for 1992 has not been published yet, but it will probably be a small deficit. Not because of any inherent defect in the system, but because unemployment is now so high that payments into the system have fallen considerably and outlays have increased enormously. The current erosion of public finances is thus not due to "costly public programs" (Vail). It is due to the capitalist crisis. When the system shows low or negative growth, the portion of surplus value that has been recirculated in the form of social benefits must be recovered by the capitalist class, even at the risk of open conflict. Recovery takes the form of cutbacks in social benefits and simultaneous plundering of the public purse, including privatization of public services and sales of public assets at bargain prices.

This is illustrated by a new pension scheme elaborated by the SAP in collaboration with the right-wing Swedish Conservative Party (*Moderatasamlingspartiet*). The scheme makes drastic changes in the current method for payment of pension contributions, which become the responsibility of the worker, not the employer. Among other things, this means that each day of unemployment over a forty-year period results in a reduction of the worker's final pension. Both the SAP and the conservatives have boasted happily that the new scheme ties the size of pensions to the rate of growth in the national economy. RIP, Lord Beveridge!

Determined efforts by the ruling class to recover the surplus value represented by social benefits have been in evidence for some years in every country in Western Europe. Naturally, the extent to which social benefits are cut back depends largely on the extent to which they exist, so that the

quantitative effects vary between countries. But the reasoning is always the same. Helmut Kohl, John Major, and Ingvar Carlsson, Chairman of the SAP, all advocate the same policies.

Ingvar Carlsson recently visited Malmö, the third largest city in Sweden and a disaster area in terms of unemployment, cutbacks in social benefits, and privatization of health care and other vital services. For example, the public bus service was recently sold to private owners. This led to immediate personnel reductions, wage cuts, and price increases. The cost of a monthly ticket for a pensioner rose from 100 to 390 kronor overnight, which effectively prevents many pensioned workers from using the bus service. Carlsson's comment on privatization in Malmö was: "I'm not familiar with the details, but in principle we are not in disagreement with our political opponents," which amounts to an endorsement of the attack on Malmö's working class.

The "popular resistance to higher taxes" alleged by Vail is a favorite myth among bourgeois economists in Sweden. Over the past fifteen years, public opinion polls have consistently shown that a majority of Swedes are ready and willing to pay higher taxes in order to maintain the public sector and social benefits.

As recently as January 18, 1994, this was confirmed by yet another public opinion poll.

Vail also names payroll levies as "driving a big wedge between employers' costs and workers' pay." This statement is rather unclear, but it appears to be the standard SAF line.

Since the 1970s SAF has insisted that high wage costs are pricing Swedish companies out of the international market, and the SAP leadership has consistently echoed the warning. My file of newspaper clippings from 1983 includes an article from *Dagens Industri*, Sweden's leading business daily, one year after a 16 percent devaluation of the krona by the SAP government. The devaluation was naturally to the disadvantage of the working class, especially to pensioned workers, since the government stated that pensioners would not receive special compensation for the increase in living costs. The

article reports that Swedish exporters had *not* cut their prices. They were satisfied with a windfall 16 percent increase on revenues from an unchanged unit volume of sales. Who wouldn't be?

If Swedish wages and payroll levies really had been creating cost disadvantages, why didn't the exporters reduce their prices and enlarge their market shares?

Ten years later, in February 1993, a few months after a huge *de facto* devaluation of 25-30 percent, the same newspaper reported a similar story.

I do not know of any convincing figures to support the claim that wages or payroll costs have had a negative effect on Swedish exports. For example, the price of Swedish pulp and paper, a major export category, rises and falls with the world price, not with wage variations. In fact, one of the biggest problems for Swedish export companies—and for the SAP—has been the large gross profits that have made it difficult to combat wage increases. The Social Democrats have attacked the problem in various ways.

In addition to the "solidarity wage policy" referred to above, in the mid-1970s the SAP Finance Minister created a series of balance-sheet reserves to which companies could make allocations in their final accounts. In principle, these were taxable when they were reversed, but could be written off directly against investments and other outlays. They allowed corporations to report lower net profits, which were of course used as a weapon in collective bargaining. The creative bookkeeping enabled by the SAP helped to keep real corporate taxes very low, despite high nominal rates. By the early 1980s, the sixteen most-traded companies on the Stockholm exchange were paying corporate taxes at about 8 percent annually, as against a nominal rate of around 65 percent.

During the recession in the early 1980s, the SAP enacted a moratorium on dividend increases, in an attempt to persuade workers to keep wage increases close to zero. A special clause allowed for exemption from the moratorium, of course. Virtually every major listed Swedish company applied

for and received an exemption. Dividends were raised quietly and discreetly, by up to 30 percent in some cases. The SAP Finance Minister did not bother to announce the fact to the general population.

Another tactic was a prolonged project for workplace democracy known as the MBL Act, which is supposed to give workers influence over management decisions. Hermele is again correct in his statement that the law allows management to make unilateral decisions as it pleases. The MBL Act is nonsense, as Vail would discover if he spent some time on a shop floor or at a building site.

Hermele claims that workplace democracy has not developed in Sweden because the “traditions of the Swedish model imply the centralization of power,” instead of “local power and influence.” But the centralization of power is in fact traceable directly to the ownership structure of capitalism, which the SAP is committed to preserve.

Yet another tactic was known as the Wage-earner Fund (*Löntagarfond*). Listed Swedish companies reporting net profits above a specified level were to make a small contribution to a fund controlled by the State. The fund was then supposed to purchase shares on the stock market. This was presented as a means of giving the working class greater control of Swedish corporations! In practice, the fund served as a source of venture capital for corporations and gave the workers no more control than they had had previously.

Big is Always Beautiful

Hermele’s description of the SAP’s collaboration with capital could be applied to any government in Western Europe, Social Democratic or not. Hermele complains that the SAP gave support to big capital at the expense of small-scale and family firms. Where has the reverse occurred? In which OECD country has the government supported small-scale and family firms at the expense of big capital? Which OECD country has *not* shown, “a strong tendency toward concentration and monopolization” of its economy since 1945?

Hermele writes that in Sweden “the strong ate the weak.” Of course they did. This is a law of life in capitalist countries, and it applies with or without the assistance of the Social Democrats. The table manners shown by the strong in the course of their meal may be more attractive in countries with Social Democratic governments, but the digestive process is the same.

In Sweden, as in every other OECD country, the state is largely, but not completely, controlled by the representatives and servants of monopoly capital. And in each country the conflicts and contradictions within the state organization and between the state and monopoly capital reflect the degree of class consciousness within the country, as well as the degree of working-class militancy. The historical task of the Social Democrats has been to serve the interests of monopoly capital by channelling working-class militancy away from the crucial question of property relations.

This explains why the party and LO have concentrated on “the promise of increasing real wages at the expense of other aspects of working life.” (Hermele) Decisions on other aspects of working life are the prerogative of the owners. Like its predecessors in Germany and elsewhere at the end of the nineteenth century, the SAP has no alternative, given its approval of capitalism.

Over-Accumulation of Capital and the SAP

As the crisis in the capitalist system deepened in the 1970s and 1980s, the contradictions in the SAP’s position became not only more acute, but increasingly more apparent. And since the party is committed to the preservation of capitalism, its policies became more and more indistinguishable from those of the bourgeois parties. Electoral support for the party among the working class therefore became increasingly uncertain.

When the Chairman of LO made a passionate plea for wage restraint in the spring of 1983, he argued that Swedish export companies would otherwise lose market share to for-

eign competitors. I heard a steel worker say “What is this guy doing as chairman of our organization? He sounds like a member of SAF’s Board of Directors!”

The party’s preoccupation with wage restraint since the mid-1970s reflects Swedish industrial capital’s anxiety about the trend to a declining profit rate. But as Marx pointed out, this decline does not necessarily lead to a decline in the *mass* of surplus value—partly thanks to countervailing action that the SAP helped to implement, including productivity increases from investments financed by the above-mentioned generous bookkeeping practices.

By the early 1980’s there was an evident contradiction in Sweden and other OECD countries between the mass of accumulated surplus value and the rates of return available from investment in production.

It is, or should be, widely known that over-accumulation of capital in the hands of the owners has been an integral element of every capitalist crisis and is a prime factor in the waves of speculation that precede and sometimes accompany large-scale declines in mass purchasing power.

I remember reading in MR around 1980 that 96 percent of the money in circulation in the United States was in speculative operations, not in production. I must admit that I thought the figure was so fantastic that it had to be a misprint, until it was confirmed by *Fortune* magazine in 1988. I have not seen any comparable figure for Sweden, but the removal of all controls on cross-border capital flows in the mid-1980s by the SAP government is an indication of how anxious the owners of capital were to valorize their holdings in ways that did not involve investment in Swedish industry. It also indicates the SAP’s eagerness to oblige.

Swedish capitalists indulged heavily in the international speculative activities of the 1980s, as Hermele states, but in this respect they were no different from their colleagues in the United States or the United Kingdom or in France, Italy, and Spain, for that matter. There is no reason to attribute this

speculation to the policies of the SAP, when it is clearly traceable to the normal functioning of the capitalist system.

Hermle also states that if the SAP had supported home-market economic activities instead of export companies it “would have weakened the hand of the transnationals,” and that the failure to do so “meant that the potential for forcing the hand of capital was lost.” I am not sure what “forcing capital’s hand” means, but I cannot understand how capital’s hand could be forced by a party that has never challenged capitalism.

The Current Situation

The SAP’s basic premise, that the welfare of the working class is dependent on corporate profits, is now being denied openly by the very corporations that the party is committed to defend. In the spring of 1993, an article in *Dagens Nyheter* (DN), Sweden’s leading daily newspaper, reported that the heads of the fifty biggest Swedish companies do not foresee any significant increase in recruitment of personnel, although they expect substantial and rising profits throughout the 1990s.

The two main factors that prevent recruitment are overcapacity and the need for further automation and rationalization, according to DN. This situation appears to be general throughout the OECD. While the general trend for growth rates continues downward, the productive forces in Sweden and other OECD countries have now developed to the point where the working class must either accept long-term mass unemployment, continuous social degradation, and drastic cuts in wages for those who have work, or achieve a fundamental change in production relations by taking over ownership of the production system.

The deep contradiction between productive forces and property relations is dramatically shown by the persistent and rising level of unemployment that is now a fact of life in Western Europe. This fact is under discussion continuously at the higher levels of the EU (European Union, as the EC is now

called) and the OECD. It has repeatedly been termed “social dynamite” by representatives of both organizations, and solutions were proposed during 1993 by everyone from the CEO of Volkswagen to Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission. The solutions range from work-sharing at reduced wages to nebulous and nonsensical programs for investment in small companies and educational programs. No one has explained exactly how small companies are supposed to generate the millions of jobs that the transnational corporations are eliminating, but the Swedish SAP is repeating the new mantra about small companies and education three times a week.

Wolfgang Schäuble, whom the *International Herald Tribune* of December 23, 1993 called a “key aide to Chancellor Helmut Kohl”, is much more realistic. He wants new legislation in Germany that would “allow the army to deal with internal security.”

It should be remembered that NATO and the WEU (West European Union, the EU’s military force) have been integrated under NATO’s command. According to *Time* magazine, NATO now comprises 2.9 million troops, with another 300,000 in the WEU. The combined fascist armies that attacked the Soviet Union in 1941 numbered about 5.1 million. In view of the advances in military technology since then, the EU/NATO military force of 3.2 million must be one of the most powerful in the history of the world.

Given the long tradition of violent repression of the working class in Europe, among other things, it seems clear that this force is the main weapon for containing the unrest that can be expected in Western Europe as the capitalist crisis intensifies, and intervening in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union if Communist Parties regain political power there.

The 1 percent of the Swedish population that owns the country’s production system are very anxious to join the EU, partly to enjoy the protection of NATO/WEU, and the leadership of the SAP has been doing its utmost to advance this noble cause. The EU involves a transfer of the already limited

political power of the masses to a Council of Ministers in Brussels that is in fact accountable to no one outside the highest echelons of corporate Europe. As Hermele indicates, economic policy will be in the hands of a central bank that is totally independent of the people's elected representatives.

The EU is the first step in the final rationalization of the European capitalist production system, and represents the last act in the tragicomedy of European bourgeois political democracy.

It is revealing and highly encouraging that the majority of the rank and file of the Swedish SAP are against membership in EU, and have not been persuaded by the abortive campaign that the party leadership launched in 1993 to promote membership on the grounds that the EU stands for "Peace, employment, and the environment."

The campaign has apparently been abandoned, probably because it cannot account for the wars in Northern Ireland and Yugoslavia, the Turkish occupation of Cyprus, galloping unemployment throughout the EU, and widespread pollution, from the North Sea to the Aegean.

But the Swedish SAP has not yet run its course. The party is now performing a revised version of its traditional balancing act. It is courting the working class with the promise of job creation and restoration of limited social benefits in a distant future, and is attempting to blame the current crisis on the current bourgeois government, instead of on capitalism.

Birgitta Dahl, a minister in the last SAP government, said in Malmö in the autumn of 1993 that it would take "three or four administrations and a lot of hard work by everyone" to restore these benefits. She means that "everyone," i.e. the working class, will have to accept hardship for twelve-sixteen years, after which life will start to improve again, although no guarantees can be provided, of course.

At the same time the SAP leadership is assuring the bourgeoisie that the prime task is to restore the health of state finances, which is code for "We will continue to dismantle the public sector."

Since the Communist movement in Sweden is small and is consistently denied access to the media, the SAP still appears to most members of the working class to be the only acceptable alternative in the 1994 elections. But the underlying split between the working class and the SAP leadership was illustrated in an opinion poll during the summer of 1993, according to which 51 percent would vote for the Social Democrats but only 35 percent had confidence in them. And the split is growing daily.

In my opinion it is highly probable that the SAP will be elected in September. But the party cannot manage the crisis other than in the interests of Swedish capitalists. The living and working conditions of the majority of Swedes will continue to deteriorate after the elections, and the growing ideological and political crisis in Sweden will probably begin to erupt in earnest late in 1995.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF HISTORIANS

by ROXANNE DUNBAR ORTIZ

During twenty years as an historian teaching Native American Studies at California State University, I have regularly required students to complete a specific research project: they must read or reread and analyze one university-level U.S. history text in current use, assessing the treatment of Native Americans, looking for both distortions and omissions. In this way I have followed U.S. history textbook development over two decades. In preparation for this panel I have read a number of new and revised textbooks and the commentaries published annually since 1992 in the *Journal of American History*. My conclusion, in answer to the question posed for this panel—what has changed, what needs to change?—is that everything has changed and nothing has changed. The new textbooks include materials on the previously marginalized—Indians, Africans, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Filipinos—who were forced into the United States project of wealth and empire building, as well as women, workers, socialists, pacifists, anti-imperialists—albeit mainly portraying them as victims, not actors. What has not changed, and why nothing has changed, is the essential origin myth.

I agree with Richard Slotkin that:

The light of American historical experience has exposed a fatal flaw in the original myth: in its intent focus on the “high purpose” of a

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single type of hero, an exclusive system of value and belief, the visions of Columbus (and his metaphorical successors) have made the reality of America and American history "hard to see." (*Gun-fighter Nation*, New York: Atheneum, 1992, p. 657)

Origin narratives are important since they form the basis of the identity of a people and the ideological basis which guides them. Essentially, the Columbus myth forms the core of the U.S. origin myth, an origin myth which celebrates colonialism and genocide. In the United States, the Columbus myth supports and reinforces the specific narrative of the founding and development of the United States. Of course, no one admits to embracing the Columbus myth anymore, especially since the widespread protests against celebrating the Quincentennary. Las Casas has been revived to "balance" the "misdeeds" of Columbus. As one scholar has noted, "as the stock of Columbus has turned bearish, that of Las Casas has gone bullish." (Martin E. Marty in the Foreword to *Bartolomé de las Casas, In Defense of the Indians*. Dekalb, Il: Northern Illinois Press, 1992: xvii) Thereby the core of the origin myth remains untouched as the discussion shifts to bad and good colonialists.

Historians are the keepers of the secrets, of the truth, and protectors of the origin myth. William S. Burroughs' narrator in his 1984 novel, *The Place of Dead Roads*, observes that in the United States

people are not bribed to shut up about what they know. They are bribed not to find out. . . . Now, Americans are told they should think. But just wait until your thinking is basically different. . . . You will find out that you AREN'T supposed to think. (p. 16)

The key phrase here is "basically different." I am not talking about free speech but rather another issue, that of asking questions that are basically different. One question that we ask about many other governments concerns legitimacy. Is the United States of America a legitimate entity? In asking this question, I may, as a specialist in international law and in history, answer, yes, it is a legitimate entity; or, conversely, the

answer may be no. But, regarding U.S. history, the question itself is not considered legitimate, and this is my point.

Yet I believe that the question of the legitimacy of the United States is not only relevant, but is the crucial question we should be asking. By questioning the legitimacy of the United States, I am not speaking so much of the legal aspect of territorial sovereignty, although there are some serious questions there, but more about the official story, the origin myth of the United States.

All of us know the fact that there were thirteen original colonies that revolted against the hated King George. Yet, when I ask my students to quickly draw an outline of the United States in 1800, they draw the present continental form. This Rorschach test of unconscious manifest destiny is quite telling and absolutely innocent. We know better, and yet the subconscious rules. This is the way the origin myth works: it simply is the way things are; destiny was manifest in the origin.

Gramsci conceptualized ideological hegemony as the complete and total domination of individuals to the point that no overt force is necessary to maintain control. Instead capitulation to the dominant system appears consensual. It does not appear as domination at all, but perniciously, as common sense.

Roland Barthes described myth as a type of speech in which meaning is drained of its historical and contingent qualities and made to appear natural. This power of myth, Barthes said, lies in its recurrence making its historical contingency appear as eternal fact and also enabling it to appear apolitical, organic rather than historically and politically constituted, appearing to have meanings in and of itself.

Why don't we call the War of Independence in North America a civil war? The Brits were fighting Brits, each loyal to a cause, one to the British Crown and the other to independence from it. Independence for what purpose? Mainly they were determined, as we well know, to move over the Allegheny mountains in defiance of the King's 1763 proclamation which forbade settlers in the British-American colonies from advancing

ing west beyond the Alleghenys, and ordered the return of those who had already done so, due to British recognition of native nations in those territories. From the beginning, the independence-minded settlers were imperialists. Independence to do what else? To own slaves. The right to property.

So the Brits who won the war wanted their own empire and wanted unlimited access to property in the form of free land and free labor. They did not hide those motives. Indeed, that is all they talked about—territorial expansion and the right to property.

The most significant act of the Congress of the Confederation, preceding the promulgation of the U.S. Constitution, was the “Northwest Ordinance,” a colonial scheme borrowed from the British with some novel innovations. It was the blueprint for gobbling up that Indian territory on the other side of the mountains. Nor did they intend to stop there. President Jefferson put it aptly in 1801:

However our present interests may restrain us within our own limits, it is impossible not to look forward to distant times, when our rapid multiplication will expand itself beyond those limits and cover the whole northern, if not the southern continent, with a people speaking the same language, governed in similar form by similar laws.

So what? So an elite created a new reality for themselves, for their own benefit. This has been true all over the world, especially during the past 500 years of colonialism and imperialism. What is different is not the historical behavior, but rather its denial or rationalization in order to continue the mythology of the origin of the United States.

Until U.S. historians are able to question and examine the origin myth they will not be able to allow themselves to ask very interesting new questions, such as: What were the geopolitical results of Indian resistance? Were the goals of the Monroe Doctrine curbed by that resistance? After all, the United States did not succeed in penetrating further than the middle of Mexico in efforts to gain direct control of the entire western hemisphere to realize Jefferson’s imperial dream.

Indian resistance in the west and southwest kept the U.S. military intensely occupied for at least a generation in the second half of the nineteenth century, curbing imperialist goals overseas. Why is little or nothing made of President Jackson's defiance of the Supreme Court decisions in the Cherokee cases? After all, Jackson used his position as commander of the military to forcibly remove the Cherokees in open contempt of the Marshall court, which he enunciated publicly and clearly. Was it a constitutional crisis? Did it have a causal effect on the road to civil war? Why do we call that era of the Jackson presidency "the age of democracy" when it is marked by the shoring up of what might even be called military dictatorship if we were looking at some other country's history? And if it was the time of the birth of U.S. nationalism as a coherent ideology, what does that tell us?

The Second Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR) is a self-contained elite Army unit that was made famous by being at the head of Patton's Third Army when it crossed Europe during the Second World War. In the Gulf War, at that farcical stage called "the ground war," the Second ACR led the tanks into Iraq. A retired commander of the ACR proudly told his TV interviewer that the unit was formed in the 1830s to fight the Seminoles and was responsible for finally defeating them in the Florida Everglades in 1836, in the third U.S. war against the Seminoles over nearly two decades. Who were the Seminoles and why are those three wars given so little attention in U.S. history textbooks, so important to the military? Why is the term "Indian Country" still used by the military to refer to enemy territory? How and why did the U.S. military become the largest military machine in human history, larger and more deadly than all other militaries in human history combined? Why did Clinton have to ritually bomb an "enemy" (Baghdad) soon after taking office?

Since the cultural upheavals in the academy during the 1960s, historians who guard the origin myth have called for objectivity and fairness in revising interpretations of U.S. history and warned against moralizing, calling for a dispassionate

and culturally relative approach. Bernard Sheehan, in a 1969 essay, "Indian-White Relations in Early America," (*William and Mary Quarterly* 3:26, 1969: 267-286) argued that an understanding of cultural conflict "diffuses the locus of guilt." Indeed it does. In the historian's search for "balance," they spout platitudes, such as "there were good and bad people on both sides," or "American culture is an amalgamation of all its ethnic groups," or "a frontier is an area of interaction of cultures, not merely advancing European settlements," or worse, that colonizer and colonized were engaged in "dialogue," thereby masking justifications and rationalizations, in short, apologies for mass robbery and murder. In seeking the nature of "cultural change" and "conflict of cultures," fundamental questions about the nature of the formation of the United States may be avoided. Furthermore, present responsibility toward that past can be rejected. A primary current example is the ignorance about U.S.-Mexican relations and the racist backlash against Mexican workers.

Why are we not looking to other countries to study how they are going about changing their textbooks? South Africa comes to mind, as well as Australia, New Zealand, Canada; countries under intense pressure by their indigenous populations and other citizens who want to be told the truth. In their cases, the truth may smart for those who are descendants of colonialists but they do not need to prove they are the greatest, most moral societies in human history, as we seem to. Instead of pressuring Mexico and Nicaragua (U.S. AID-funded projects) to change their history textbooks to be kinder to the United States, we should be looking at our own.

George Orwell rightly pointed out that whoever owns the past owns the future and that those in power in the present control the memory of the past. Historians are in the position to upset the ideological hegemony of the powerful.

NORTH KOREA: THE PENTAGON & ISSUES OF WAR AND PEACE IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

by DANIEL B. SCHIRMER

For those who are supporters of peace the most disturbing feature in the Asia-Pacific today is the U.S. military build-up in South Korea which fuels tensions on the Korean Peninsula and carries with it the threat of war. This situation springs directly from the post-Cold War strategy of the U.S. high command.

In mid-January, 1990, Bernard E. Trainor, military expert for the *New York Times*, reported discussions taking place on post-Cold War strategy at the U.S. Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. "The Russians are 'out' and the Third World is 'in'" was the way a Marine officer at the college summarized the matter for Trainor. But the focus of U.S. military strategy in the post-Cold War world, replacing the containment of Soviet Communism, is generally described in terms less politically provocative than those heard by Trainor: it is known as the promotion of "regional stability." The meaning remains the same, however. The two countries the Pentagon currently sees as the greatest threats to regional stability are North Korea in the Asia-Pacific and Iraq in the Mideast, and both belong to the Third World. In effect the Pentagon has adopted for its post-Cold War role that of global policeman, with special attention to the Third World.

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What is new in the post-Cold War world, in addition, is the importance of the Asia-Pacific region to the Pentagon. In 1992 the military forces of the United States in Asia were indeed impressive: 300,000 servicemen and women, about half of them deployed in the Western Pacific; roughly half of the warships of the U.S. Navy; two-thirds of the Marine Corps; two Army divisions, one of them forward deployed in Korea; and several tactical fighter wings of the U.S. Air Force.

The commander of these U.S. Pacific forces is Admiral Charles R. Larson. Last fall he gave a speech in Honolulu in which he stated that the foreign deployment of the U.S. military is being cut back, save in the Asia-Pacific. During the Cold War the three main centers of U.S. forward deployment in Asia were Japan, the Philippines, and South Korea. Today, U.S. troops on bases in Japan and South Korea are very near their Cold War strength. In the Philippines U.S. troops have been withdrawn. This is not due, however, to a Pentagon decision as with troop reductions in Europe, but because the Philippine Senate in 1991 refused to agree to the continued presence of U.S. troops in that country, despite the Pentagon's wishes to the contrary. However, to restore the Philippines to the Asian system of forward deployment, Admiral Larson made an arrangement with the Philippine military in 1992 giving U.S. armed forces access to Philippine ports and airfields.

The Admiral related this divergence between the Pentagon's moves to reduce U.S. military forces in other areas of Cold War strength, while maintaining them in Asia, directly to the increasing economic importance of the Asia-Pacific to the United States, recalling the fact that U.S. trade with the Asia-Pacific today is greater than with either Europe or Latin America. A west coast authority on U.S. naval matters, Charles A. Meconis, states unequivocally: "the central post-Cold War rationale for maintaining a major U.S. Asia-Pacific military presence is the economic importance of the region." Meconis cites as authorities for his statement not only Admiral Larson

but also Winston Lord, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific.

The maintenance of U.S. military strength in the Asia-Pacific highlights a salient feature of the present era. In the post-Cold War world the focus of Pentagon strategy may have changed from the Soviet Union to the Third World, and the focus of its foreign military deployment may have shifted from Europe to the Asia-Pacific (and the Mideast). But one thing remains constant: the Pentagon's efforts to hold the United States to its status as a military superpower.

The Pentagon claims U.S. superpower status aids U.S. corporate expansion. A senior Pentagon official told Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times* that during the Cold War years Taiwanese businesses gave preference to U.S. firms over Japanese because the U.S. military was protecting them. In the post-Cold War world evidently a successful U.S. police action has the same effect. In October 1993, after the U.S.-led victory in the Gulf War, Saudi Arabia signed a \$6 billion contract for jet-liners with U.S. corporations, Boeing and McDonnell Douglas. A European consortium, Airbus Industries, which had hoped for a fifty-fifty split, complained that Washington had pressured Saudi Arabia "which has come to rely on the United States for its security."

It is South Korea that the Pentagon has chosen as the area for the assertion of the United States as a military superpower in Asia, using South Korean territory for threatening displays of armed strength. The U.S. military and its political allies claim that the arms build up in South Korea is needed because North Korea is today a nuclear threat. The CIA has declared that North Korea has a bomb. But since that organization's failure to foresee the collapse of the Soviet Union, its intelligence gathering capability is much in question. The South Korean President, who would have much interest in the matter, flatly states that there is no evidence that North Korea possesses a bomb as yet. The U.S. military and its allies therefore focus on what they declare to be North Korea's interest in producing a bomb and point to North

Korea's threat to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and its refusal to allow certain nuclear facilities to be inspected by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The Pentagon is today in possession of some 17,000 nuclear warheads. As of February, 1993, it had targeted North Korea with the hydrogen bomb; it can, in addition, threaten North Korea with seaborne nukes. Before Washington presumes to admonish North Korea about nuclear weapons, it should withdraw its own nuclear threat to that country and start to drastically reduce its own stockpile. To do otherwise smacks of hypocrisy and arrogance.

There are those who believe that tensions on the Korean Peninsula could be relieved in the near future if the United States and South Korea were to consistently follow a policy of diplomacy and negotiation with North Korea. But this is not the view of the Pentagon. Lt. Gen. James R. Clapper, head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, says: "North Korea will be the central major military threat for the next few years."

The threat of war on the Korean peninsula has been marked by war talk which has become less extreme on the side of North Korea, and war preparations which are increasing on the side of the Pentagon. U.S. and South Korean officials told the *Christian Science Monitor* in March that "despite North Korea's threatening rhetoric and its reputed nuclear threat, it has not recently beefed-up its conventional military preparations for war." Captain Kevin Warren, a U.S. officer serving with the U.N. Command Security Force at the DMZ, said, "We've seen no signs that they're up to anything."

On the other hand, James A. Baker 3d, who assisted President Bush as Secretary of State during the Gulf War, described the Pentagon's war preparations in the *Boston Globe* of April 10, 1994, with obvious approval:

The United States has dispatched improved Patriot air-defense missiles to South Korea, augmented its naval forces and called for the resumption of Team Spirit, the joint U.S. and South Korean military exercise . . . All these measures are overdue.

For his part, Admiral Larson boasted of all the forward deployment, like access in the Philippines and bases in Japan, that was in place to reinforce the U.S. military on the Korean peninsula should the need arise:

America has forward military bases and multiple access agreements, making for a secure strategic line of communications which ensures that a ton of ammunition is more likely to reach the demilitarized zone from Fort Lewis, Washington, than from Pyongyang.

The U.S. build-up so far has not satisfied the U.S. hawks who have become more vocal, striving to exert pressure on the Clinton administration. Brent Scowcroft, President Bush's national security advisor, recently urged Washington to move an aircraft carrier to the region and deploy more fighter planes there. James A. Baker 3d has raised his voice to the same end, so that two of the principal architects of the Gulf War are at work again. Congressional hawks are not far behind. Robert Dole, the minority leader of the Senate, has attacked President Clinton for not being "firm" enough, and the Democratic Senator Charles Robb introduced a resolution calling for the re-introduction of tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea, which the Senate subsequently passed.

In March, after the IAEA reported an unsuccessful attempt to inspect all of what it believed to be North Korea's nuclear facilities, U.S. hawks mounted pressure for the imposition of economic sanctions on North Korea by passage of a U.S. Security Council resolution to that effect, despite a threat from North Korea that such sanctions would be considered an act of war.

This particular political crisis was moderated by the intercession of the Chinese government which insisted that a resolution threatening sanctions should be replaced by a statement from the U.N. Security Council President urging North Korea to cooperate fully with the IAEA and declaring that the matter would be reviewed after six weeks, in the middle of May.

As the *New York Times* described the situation:

China's action left the Clinton administration caught between Asian nations urging a go-slow approach and conservative lawmakers who have assailed Clinton for not being tough enough.

On this occasion, President Clinton opted for the go-slow approach. Popular pressure for peace would help President Clinton continue on this course.

That such pressure for peace would be timely was indicated by an interview U.S. Defense Secretary William Perry gave to NBC's "Meet the Press," on Sunday, April 3, 1994. After remarking that Washington would seek economic sanctions if the situation doesn't change within six months, Perry said, "It's conceivable where those actions might provoke North Koreans into unleashing a war and that is a risk that we're willing to take." According to the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, Perry's statement drew immediate condemnation from Philippine Foreign Minister Roberto Romulo who called instead for dialogue.

On Monday, April 4, 1994, John Quinn-Judge wrote the *Boston Globe* from Washington and noted the fact that officials of the CIA and Defense Department believe Pyongyang has the nuclear bomb, while those of the State Department do not. Quinn-Judge continued:

The uncertainty about whether North Korea has nuclear arms is accompanied, top Clinton officials say, by a broad divergence of views within the administration about North Korean motives. . . . The one certainty, officials say, is that any war with the North would be horribly destructive for both North and South Korea, and for the U.S. troops involved. . . . North Korea would be destroyed, officials believe. But victory would be costly.

It is impossible to understand the situation in Korea and the Pentagon's belligerent attitude without reference to their Cold War origins. When the Soviet Union collapsed, the main rationale for the huge military budget and the forward deployment of U.S. armed forces collapsed with it. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than on the Korean peninsula. During the Cold War the U.S. intervened in Korea on the side of South

Korea to contain the expansion of what it regarded as a spearhead of Russian Communism, the North Korean regime of Kim Il Sung. After a stalemate was achieved in the war, the United States left nearly 40,000 troops and hundreds of tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea as an important element in its strategy of Soviet containment. These troops and weapons threatened North Korea for some four decades. The nuclear weapons on South Korean soil were removed by Bush, but the troops remain.

Now the Soviet Union is no more, and Kim Il Sung's other Communist ally, China, with whom he fought the Korean War, has strong and friendly relations with South Korea. It would seem that the reasons for the Pentagon's military hostility to North Korea are no longer valid. How to explain what appears to be the Pentagon's implacable enmity to North Korea?

The root cause of its reinvigorated animosity toward North Korea lies in the Pentagon's need to find a new post-Cold War rationale for the huge arms expenditures and far-flung deployments in Asia and elsewhere that sustain this huge U.S. military bureaucracy and are its life-blood.

To say, as have Admiral Larson and others, that the massive U.S. military presence in the Asia-Pacific is accounted for by the expanding interests of U.S. corporations in the area, and to leave the matter at this point, is to speak too plainly of economic imperialism; some political-moral justification is needed for a more widespread public acceptance. Some new bogeyman must be found to replace Reagan's "Evil Empire." Hence the demonization of Kim Il Sung, following so shortly after the demonization of Saddam Hussein.

It is obvious that the hawks have made the key point in their demonization of Kim Il Sung in what they perceive as the North Korean interest in nuclear weapons. On April 16, 1994, Kim Il Sung gave an important interview to Mike Chinoy, CNN's bureau chief in Beijing. In this interview Kim Il Sung said he has no plans to develop nuclear weapons and

wants peace. In fact, he criticized a North Korean official who had threatened South Korea with war.

"The world is now calling on our country to show nuclear weapons we don't have," Kim said. "What's the use to have them? We cannot use nuclear weapons against our Korean nationals" in the South. He continued, "We don't want war . . . We have done a lot of construction in our country and we don't want to destroy it. Those who want war are out of their minds." One of his officials, who, in March, had threatened to turn Seoul into "a sea of flames" was "out of place."

Chinoy said, "The communist leader seemed to be trying to reduce tensions that have built up since the North Koreans . . . refused to allow a full international inspection of their nuclear facilities." The interview will certainly make it more difficult for the Pentagon and the hawks in the United States to keep building up a war atmosphere. Their calls for warships, planes and nuclear bombs will now sound somewhat forced.

Kim Il Sung, in this interview, did not refer to the return of the specialists from IAEA. But opinion has been growing in the United States that Washington must offer something Kim Il Sung wants if the inspections are to take place. Professor Chae Jin Lee of Claremont McKenna College in Claremont, California told the *Christian Science Monitor* on March 29 that

the United States must articulate what it will do if North Korea makes concessions . . . Without such U.S. promises as ending a trade embargo against Pyongyang or declaring that there will be no nuclear strikes, hardliners in the Pyongyang leadership may be prevailing in their strategy to stall inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The *Monitor* article indicates that there are signs that such a policy of diplomacy and mutual concession might work:

North Korea has not tested a nuclear device, an important threshold to make any threat credible. Nor has it actually withdrawn from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT); even though it made the threat a

year ago "That's the tip-off that North Korea wants a solution and would get back to diplomacy," says Bruce Cumings, a North Korea scholar at the University of Chicago.

Kim Il Sung's statement of April 16 should help make a diplomatic solution all the more possible.

During the discussion on economic sanctions, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported that

three Asian countries with the largest stake in the issue—China, Japan and South Korea—all have indicated a varying degree of resistance to economic sanctions . . . U.S. officials said. . . all prefer to deal with North Korea diplomatically.

The government of Russia, another important country in the Asia-Pacific, has indicated a similar preference, urging an international conference on the Korean problem.

It is noteworthy that, although this is an Asian affair, the Pentagon and the hawks who support it, march ahead and push their own proposals, even though these may be counter to policies of the Asian countries most concerned. Evidently, the Pentagon and its allies believe this to be the prerogative of the U.S. military superpower as it polices the Asia-Pacific.

There is increasing popular dissatisfaction with the overbearing influence of the Pentagon in the post-Cold War world, to be seen in Asian countries and in the United States as well. Godfrey Sperling, a regular columnist of the *Christian Science Monitor*, writes, "Plenty of polls show conclusively that the public certainly disapproves of the U.S. being a world policeman." In the Philippines, there is opposition to Larson's access agreement which violates the constitutional provision banning the presence of foreign troops except when approved by the Philippine Senate. In Japan, much to popular disapproval, the Pentagon presses the Japanese government to abrogate Article 9, the anti-war provision of the Japanese constitution. In South Korea, according to the Korea Church Coalition of New York, there is "growing clamor" against the Pentagon's efforts to increase tension and foment a war atmosphere.

Why are there those in the United States who are preparing to risk a war over an issue on the Korean peninsula that might be settled by peaceful means? Is it because a regional war with a smaller Third World nation is the ultimate validation of the U.S. as a military superpower in the post-Cold War world, renewing the Pentagon's hold on the U.S. budget and re-affirming the central place of the U.S. military-industrial complex in our society? Is it because, following a U.S. victory in such a war, the economic-political position of the U.S. corporate elite would be strengthened in the flourishing markets of Asia, as happened in the oil-rich Gulf?

There are many in the United States who reject this international role for their country—who want instead a government that follows a policy of peace abroad and reform at home. Speaking for such Americans are U.S. organizations who have come forward with proposals for U.S. policy changes that could ease the tensions on the Korean peninsula and strengthen the cause of peace in Asia. One of these, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) urges a number of steps to be taken by Washington:

1. that the United States and DPRK (North Korea) cease all talk of preparation for military action, resume the path of quiet diplomacy—with a view to establishing normal diplomatic relations;

2. that the United States act to reduce tensions by suspending once and for all the Team Spirit joint military exercises with the ROK (South Korean) military;

3. that the United States, recognizing the end of the Cold War alliance structures, resume the withdrawal, step-by-step, of its troops in South Korea;

4. that the United States take the lead in promoting de-nuclearization in Korea and worldwide, by radically reducing its own nuclear arsenal and pursuing an even-handed application of non-proliferation policies toward all countries.

It remains up to peace-minded citizens in the United States to develop a campaign to support such proposals, and help make the United States a force for peace in Asia, not a

force for war. Many in the Asia-Pacific are alienated by the Pentagon's preparations for war in the region that is their home. By joining hands with Asians who are against war, those of like mind in the U.S. can make their best contribution to peace.

If all the forces for peace in the Asia-Pacific unite and make their voices heard, it does seem that the Pentagon's military build-up and the threat of war that goes with it could be thwarted. That would really be something new in the post-Cold War world!

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THE DISABILITY RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND THE LEFT

by JAMES I. CHARLTON

As a person with a disability who has been active for more than twenty years in left politics, I find the relationship between the disability rights movement and the left a frustrating and often disturbing one. Here I discuss the growing political consciousness of people with disabilities, the politics and challenges of the disability rights movement (DRM), and the movement's relation to the left.

Disability Consciousness and Social Change

Many barriers exist that have prevented the development of a mass disability consciousness. These include a history of oppression, isolation, degradation, and paternalism. Furthermore, people with disabilities have multiple, partially overlapping, and semi-contradictory identities. We can assert an identity based on our own specific disability, our ethnicity, or even the disability organizations or issues we relate to. Our self-definition is further influenced by gender, class, and sexual orientation.

In spite of these factors, we have witnessed a growing identity with disability related issues by people who have historically not self-identified with even their own disabilities,

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let alone broader social issues as they relate to disability. This was recently confirmed in a Harris Poll, where over 60 percent of people with disabilities identified with specific disability issues. Tens of thousands of people with disabilities have become involved in disability-related issues. Thousands have joined protests around inaccessible public transportation or the lack of adequate personal assistance services. In 1988, students at Gallaudet University, a university in Washington D.C. for people who are deaf or hearing-impaired, forced the University's Board of Directors to rescind an offer of the University's presidency to a hearing person and to offer the position to a deaf man instead. A disability culture is emerging in fields like music, theater, and literature that emphasizes pride, anger, and self-directed humor. Last year, the first national conference of university students with disabilities was held at the University of Minnesota under the theme "Disabled and Proud."

Recent developments in the disabled community parallel, although to a much lesser degree, the process of consciousness that marked the rise of many liberation movements. Today, we are witnessing the gradual replacement of the "false consciousness" of self-pity and helplessness by the "raised consciousness" of dignity, anger, and empowerment. This is a significant change within our community in less than twenty years. The way in which thousands of people with disabilities relate personally and politically to society has been profoundly affected; basic notions are changing:

(The) movement goes beyond the attempt to secure new rights and entitlement for disabled persons. It also represents an attempt to reshape the manner in which the problem of disability is defined and to encourage new interventions. We are witnessing the emergence of a new paradigm designed to redirect the thinking of disability professionals and researchers alike.¹

The Disability Rights Movement

It's hard to pinpoint when the disability rights movement began. In the first part of this century, a few individuals with significant disabilities began to be involved in issues like vocational rehabilitation, social services, and politics. Well known persons in this period include Mary Switzer and Helen Keller. Today, most activists locate the beginning of the contemporary disability rights movement in the early 1970s.

People with disabilities who were influenced by or directly involved with the student movement and civil rights movement began to organize around disability related issues. Many began to see the barriers to their independence as politically or socially determined. They came to understand that both external barriers like architectural and communication inaccessibility, poverty, and discrimination, and internal barriers like the lack of self-esteem, were the results of a social process, potentially subject to change.

As activists began to take up major social and political issues, the DRM began to develop and grow. These issues include: the inaccessibility of public transportation; the lack of accessible, affordable housing; the institutionalizing of poor, young people with severe disabilities in nursing homes because of the prohibitive cost of personal assistance; the struggle for inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms; and efforts to change the way in which everyone relates to, perceives, and understands disability.

For example, our boycott campaign against the Jerry Lewis Telethon (that raises fund through crude appeals to pathos) targeted pity itself—the major slogan was “piss on pity”; in transit we focused on the term “special services”—“special means segregated”; in the campaign against nursing homes we have targeted the nursing home industry and medical establishment—“we are not sick, free our people.”

It is only recently, as the DRM has created a critical mass of activists, that these issues have been taken up in a systematic and nationally organized way. While the disability rights movement has grown over the last fifteen years, our movement is

still small with a few thousand committed and determined individuals in the United States. The movement itself does not have an ideological center of gravity. There is and have been diverse political points of view and political tendencies within the movement.

These include in order of size and influence: activists who work in the field of disability, have a liberal political orientation, and relate to issues through some disability-related organization; social service/academic/government professional types (some may have disabilities); militants who have Alinsky-like politics and are mainly active around specific issues (like the group, ADAPT); parents of disabled children, primarily involved in education issues; leftists who may be involved with ADAPT, academic/policy study, or independent living centers; and lastly, bourgeois elements—rich disabled people or people connected through philanthropy.

Within the DRM there are specific issues where strategic disagreements surface among the various tendencies. This is evident in regard to national concerns like health care reform, education, and housing; issues where political and class orientation informs the perception of the problem and its solution is. A good example might be education. Most disability-related demands involve equal access to education. That is, we say students with disabilities should be educated in regular classrooms. Progressives and leftists take this farther. We say the entire educational system (especially in urban areas where race and class oppression are crucial) is a mess. The overall priorities of capitalism govern, and most students are getting a poor education. We say that inclusion and integration is just one part of a fundamental structural change that needs to occur in education. Mere equality in (poor) education is a very limited vision.

There is also a political struggle between disabled activists and others in the DRM about control and orientation of the movement. For example, a host of individuals from social service and government backgrounds have made a career out of government programs, “special” schools, rehabilitation

agencies, and clubs that have been set up for the disabled (not by people with disabilities). As activists began to demand a central place in all decision-making regarding disability and a civil rights agenda, antagonisms developed. The old-guard types rejected the politics and militancy of the activists because it threatened the status quo. In addition, the politics of the DRM directly or indirectly subjected conservative views to criticism and relegated individuals without disabilities to roles as supporters and secondary actors.

These conflicts and differences are very complicated. To take the example of education again. Parents of disabled children have a long history of advocacy in the field. They believe they have a moral authority comparable to people with disabilities. Obviously, parents play a vital role in education at all levels of education but their orientation and the orientation of the DRM often diverge. That is, most parents active in disability rights and education do it because of their child's specific or perceived needs. Disability rights activists have become involved in education issues because they personally went through segregated education and have come to a political consciousness about the need to eliminate all segregated education, period. Whatever the particularities, the DRM sees the larger picture: people with disabilities must be integrated into everyday life with or without risk. Parents most often can only see their children.

Differences like these have created a challenge on how to unite as many forces as possible within the DRM, while keeping disabled activists themselves in control. Fortunately, there are many areas in which individuals within the DRM can work together and find common ground.

The most important of these are independent living centers (CILs). The first center, Berkeley CIL, began in 1973 but most CILs were set up in the early 1980s. There are now more than 200! CILs are the most important organizations within the DRM for two reasons. One is that most of the early disability rights leaders were identified with CILs and the philosophy of independent living (empowerment through

self-help) formed much of the basic philosophical underpinnings of the larger DRM. Second, because of the sheer numbers of paid staff working at CILs (thousands), centers have extensive resources. Ed Roberts, one of the founders of the Berkeley CIL put it this way in 1977:

In its broadest implications, the independent living movement is the civil rights movement for millions of Americans with disabilities. It is the wave of protest against segregation and discrimination and affirmation of the right and ability of persons with disabilities to share fully in the responsibilities and joys of our society.²

The proliferation and dispersment of CILs around the country is one of many important advances for people with disabilities in the last decade. Others include: the passage of important legislation like the Civil Rights Restoration Act, the Fair Housing Amendments Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act; the development of activist cores in some cities (some linked to ADAPT, others to local groups and issues) and a strengthening of communication and coordination. Our movement has achieved a limited and fragile but important maturity (for lack of a better term). That's the good news.

The bad news is the reality for most of the disabled community: extreme isolation, rampant unemployment, poor education, and continuing discrimination, neglect, abuse, institutionalization, self-pity, and so on. The fact remains that people with disabilities are still the most marginalized and unorganized sector of the United States, only slightly better off than a decade ago. In addition, the absence of a strong left pole within the DRM coupled with the generally passive political culture of the United States has generated a growing conservatism and bureaucratism within the movement itself.

In addition, the political questions facing the disability rights movement are many. These include: how to use the ADA and other legal mandates; how to influence health care reform and the long term care program proposed by Clinton; how to organize around the many specific issues; how to grapple with class, race and gender issues within the DRM;

how to combat discrimination and backward attitudes about disability; what role to take in electoral politics; and how and when to unite with other movements.

Disability Rights and the Left

I believe that the most important political issues concern class, race, and gender. These overarching considerations should be the primary focus for our work on the political left. However, other issues demand attention and support from the left. These include environmental protection, gay and lesbian rights, and disability rights.

The disability rights movement occupies a curious position within the overall movement for social change. For many, probably most leftists and progressive activists, disability politics has been an afterthought at best. Many leftists would argue that the DRM has limited political significance and little relation to the question of political power. This view is not only wrong but arrogant.

People with disabilities experience discrimination as a group. Most disabled people subsist on low incomes, experiencing oppression along class lines as well. The anti-hegemonic implications of an emerging disability identity and movement have to be measured against these dual dimensions. Self-determination is usually raised as one objective of liberatory politics. The “goals” of the disability rights movement are demands for various forms of community control and empowerment.

The weakness of the left in the United States today has posed serious problems for activists. We cannot influence every issue the way we would like, but we can develop a politics and program that speak to the broad social issues that require, in fact demand, social change. Leftists in the DRM can argue persuasively that disability is a product of many factors directly related to capitalism and imperialism including: war, repression, poverty, and backward social priorities. Our perspective is that U.S. political, economic, and military hegemony is a

major cause of the prevalence of disability throughout the world.

As the disability rights movement develops cores of activists who are committed to political change over the long run, the left must be accessible to these people. Today, left politics has to abandon sectarianism and old ideas. Unfortunately, old ideas still influence most people on the left about disability. I have often heard leftists use terms like “handicapped,” “crippled,” “confined to a wheelchair,” “deaf and dumb”—words and phrases that have been criticized for years by the disability rights movement. Programs put on by left groups are often in inaccessible buildings, without interpreters for deaf people, and when we as leftists raise concerns and criticisms, some activists think they can get away with it by just saying “I forgot, we’ll make sure that the next meeting is accessible,” or “we can’t afford an interpreter, could someone volunteer?” It’s hard to argue for a leftist political agenda within the disability rights movement when the left itself is inaccessible to people with disabilities. That must change.

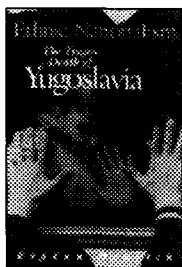
The left should recognize that disability rights is part of the same continuum as civil and human rights and incorporate in its analysis of prejudice, discrimination, and segregation the oppression of people with disabilities. Leftists should become more aware of disability language and culture and speak out against backward attitudes and stereotypes.

Big changes are taking place within the disabled community. There are more organizers and activists than ever before; people who are seeking new solutions. The upshot is that if disability activists and the disability rights movement is to embrace the left, the left must embrace the disability rights movement.

NOTES

1. DeJong, G., *The Movement For Independent Living: Origins, Ideology and Implications for Disability Research*, East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1979.
2. Roberts E.V., *Forward to Emerging Issues in Rehabilitation* by S.S. Pflueger. Washington D.C.:Institute for Research Utilization, 1977.

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EUROPE'S CRISES

by DANIEL SINGER

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, a well-orchestrated chorus proclaimed the end of history and capitalist eternity. History, as if offended by such silly predictions, quickened pace and today nobody will seriously contend that everything is for the best in the best all of possible capitalist worlds. On the contrary, we are obviously living in a time of deep crisis. The rapid capitalist invasion of Eastern Europe, nicknamed shock therapy, is meeting serious resistance, illustrated for instance by the need to bomb Parliament in Moscow, and is provoking popular discontent, expressed most recently in the Polish election.¹ The making, or remaking, of a capitalist class within years, and not decades and centuries, proves a more difficult exercise than was assumed.

Prospects are not bright on the western front either. The twin debate on the necessity to radically reduce the working week and the imperative to deprive the workers of safeguards conquered in past battles, in the name of "flexibility" imposed by the international market, show the growing awareness that mass unemployment in Western Europe is not a transient phenomenon, a phase in the trade cycle, but a structural problem and a striking expression of the contrast between our technological genius and the foolishness of our social organi-

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zation. While stretching over the planet, the reign of capital is revealed in its nakedness. It may even be reaching the end of its tether. But there is nobody to push it off the historical stage. The left, looking back nostalgically to the postwar years of unprecedented expansion, still dreams of social contract or historical compromise, and seems totally incapable of inventing a radical alternative. The bankruptcy of Social Democracy follows the total collapse of neo-Stalinism.

It is these three closely connected crises that I shall try to analyze today, a subject so vast that I must at once make two qualifications. Firstly, though in our increasingly deregulated world the crisis is obviously global, I shall stick to Europe, partly because we have sessions to deal with other areas, largely because, in any case, I must pack so much in less than an hour. Which brings me to the second point, the inevitably compressed nature of my argument. I apologize in advance for what may look like the sin of the journalistic profession, which first oversimplifies and then exaggerates.

1989 does mark the end of an era, but the end of what? Certainly not the end of socialism, as it is being suggested with an obvious purpose, because you can only bury the previously existent. I would say the final end of a Marxist tragedy, which began when the Bolsheviks tried to find a shortcut, rifle in hand, into the future. As all Marxists at the time, they did not believe they could build socialism on their own in backward Mother Russia. But, the revolution having failed to spread, they had the choice between surrender and a holding operation. The immensity of their task was summed up in the contradictory nature of its definition—primitive socialist accumulation.¹ Whether a regime of bloody repression and Byzantine cult, in other words Stalinism, was its inevitable political counterpart is a subject we can leave to another conference. The mechanism functioned in a way as long as the economy remained primitive and labor as well as natural resources freely available; the breakneck industrialization did enable the Red Army to defeat the Nazi invaders. Let me add at once that this system of command from above, designed for

semiliterate *muzhiks*, had nothing to do with socialist planning and was rapidly rendered obsolete by the progress of the economy. Stalin's successors were aware of it. But they were also conscious that the changes needed to reform the system threatened their privileges. They wanted Stalinism plus security of tenure. Nikita Khrushchev, whose half-hearted efforts endangered their position, was thrown overboard. Leonid Brezhnev, who preserved their privileges, stayed in office for eighteen years. The price of that stability was stagnation. With production slackening pace and the military burden growing, the neo-Stalinist system was, in historical terms, doomed.

This brief summary is simply to say that *perestroika* was an attempt by the ruling establishment to perpetuate its reign by changing the method of management and the manner of extracting surplus. It in no way diminishes the historical merit of Gorbachev, who grasped that economic change requires political reform, or the excitement of the first years of *glasnost* as the frontiers of freedom were being extended and the nation was recovering its memory. Yet it was reform from above, affecting the people rather than involving them as actors in this transformation. For a spell, Gorbachev gave the impression that, since the workers were likely to be the first victims of the reform, he would try to win their active support, but he quickly gave up the attempt. Thus, he found himself without a constituency when the privileged sections of the intelligentsia, the *priviligentsia*, deserted him to climb on Yeltsin's bandwagon, assuming that it would take them more rapidly towards a capitalist society.

The battle, naturally, was not over. It was no longer one between *apparatchiks* and managers over the shape of society. It was an inner struggle within the establishment over the pace, and therefore the ruthlessness, with which capitalism was to be introduced. And a bitter one because it now involved power as a means for distributing property and property as a future source of power. To suggest, as our ministers and their spokesmen have done, that this conflict between President and Parliament, which reached its first bloody climax last

October, was one between “democrats” and “ex-Communists” is too ridiculous to be taken seriously. (Thus the party boss of Sverdlovsk, the arch-*apparatchik* Yeltsin is a “democrat,” whereas the Parliamentary leader Ruslan Khasbulatov, who had a party card like almost every professor, is an ex-Communist.) This sounds like a joke. But can one seriously distinguish the dividing line?

At the risk of oversimplification, it is possible to put on one side the advocates of shock therapy, whose most articulate spokesmen are Yegor Gaidar, the Deputy Prime Minister and now leader of Russia's Choice or Boris Fedorov, Minister of Finance.² They and their supporters can only gain if the present system is smashed, if on its ruins they can set up new enterprises or buy the broken ones at bargain basement prices, with the help of foreign capital or of domestic speculators. Their opponents, mainly managers of big enterprises, are best described as the caretakers, rather than the defenders of, state property, since they hope to take over these firms, after a spell of state capitalism. For this reason, they don't want them to be smashed or sold on the cheap. This managerial lobby is linked with Arkady Volsky's Union of Industrialists, which was at the heart of the centrist Civic Union, and the Prime Minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin.

The frontiers are not clear-cut. It may, for instance, be objected that Yeltsin the pragmatic is essentially in favor of his own survival. His camarilla, however, known as the collective Rasputin, did put its money on shock therapy. Similarly, on the other side, the Civic Union did split as the conflict with Yeltsin drove Aleksandr Rutskoi into an alliance with Stalinist and jingoist diehards. (Here, I would like to make a brief digression. My strong condemnation of the so-called democrats with blood on their hands in no way implies an approval for their opponents. As Heinrich Heine used to say: *alle beide stinken*, both sides stink. I only resent that one of the stinking sides is being presented to us as Chanel Number 5.)

Yet was it necessary to smash Parliament, write a constitution made to measure establishing a presidential monarchy,

and force Western propaganda to proclaim in Orwellian fashion that dictatorship is democracy? To prove that an iron hand may be required to impose capitalism at breakneck speed, we shall look at neighboring Poland, the pioneer and model of shock therapy.

Lobsters, say French cookery books, love to be boiled alive. According to the preachers of the capitalist gospel, the people of Eastern Europe love to have their living standards cut. Lobsters don't vote. East Europeans do. Last September, the Poles, described as happy patients cured through shock therapy, surprised the world by voting out the coalition connected with that treatment and voting in two parties linked with the *ancien regime*. They obviously did not vote for long lines or for censorship. If there was any nostalgia it was for a world, however unattractive, in which you did not fear for your job, for a place in hospital, for the education of your children. Having four years earlier rejected what was known as socialism, they were now voting against "really existing capitalism," at least in its version for Eastern Europe.

Naturally, there were specifically Polish elements in this election—the humbling of the Catholic Church or the end of the saga of Solidarity. Yet the most significant for Eastern Europe as a whole was the vote against the Balcerowicz plan, that is to say, the shock therapy prescribed by the international financial establishment. The parties connected with that policy captured about one-quarter of the vote. This roughly corresponds to the estimates of the proportion of people who are not worse off than before, indeed some of whom are incomparably better off. The bulk of the Poles voted against the sharp drop in living standards, against attacks on the welfare state, against growing inequality, against the arrogant power of money.

The result was so striking because Poland did present particularly favorable conditions for the application of shock therapy. Its farming was dominated by smallholders and there was quite a lot of private enterprise in trade. Above all, Poland was the only country in the area where the transition was being

carried by a really popular movement. Lech Walesa was no *apparatchik*. He was a genuine resistance hero surrounded by similar underground figures. When they told the workers there was no alternative, they were listened to, at least for a time. Now Solidarity was paying the price of its betrayal and Poland was proving the long-term incompatibility between shock therapy and a democratic regime. And what was true of Poland was even more so of Russia, which has no Solidarity, where discontent is high, though restructuring has not yet reached its painful stage, that of mass unemployment. If you try to introduce capitalism there by shock tactics you need a czar, even if you baptize him democratic.

Before we move westward, let us recapitulate. We are witnessing in Eastern Europe something unprecedented, the attempt to create a class of property owners almost instantly. The interests are still very far from crystallized, the numerous parties trying, inadequately, to represent classes in the process of formation. Two factions within the ruling establishment are fighting for power and property. The rest of society, and notably the workers, are groping for position. They are, to use Marx's expression, classes in themselves but not for themselves. And, with socialism discredited, there is no genuine left to provide them with a purpose. All this in an explosive climate of social strain and enormous corruption.

* * *

Providing the background for Western Europe should take less time. The thirty years or so after the last war in this area will go down in the books as a period of unprecedented growth and of profound social transformation, particularly deep in countries like France or Italy, where the industrial revolution had not gone as far as in Britain or Germany. Those were the years of the vanishing peasant, of mass migration from country to town, and, this not being enough to satisfy the demand for labor, of mass immigration. It was also the period of rapid and regular rise in living standards, as measured in material terms, changing completely the patterns of

consumption. Ideologically, it was the era of the “end of ideology,” of the assumption that capitalism had found the secret of eternal youth, that the vagaries of the cycle were insignificant and unemployment, merely frictional, a marginal phenomenon.

But the fairy tale did not last. By the mid-seventies came the time of restructuring. Our own *perestroika*, we were assured, was only provisional, affecting such traditional sectors as coal, steel, and textiles, with the services absorbing the surplus labor from manufacturing. Which they did for a time. Then, the same causes—the search for profit and the spread of automation—produced the same effects in banks and other offices. Unemployment climbed, the provisional becoming permanent.

Ideology coming to the rescue, the eighties saw the international fashion of Thatcherism as well as the glorification of von Hayek and Milton Friedman. They also witnessed the spread of deregulation and the extraordinary expansion of international finance. The daily foreign transactions have now reached the astronomical level of one thousand billion dollars, the equivalent of all the gold and foreign currency reserves of all the countries belonging to the International Monetary Fund. Even allowing for double accounting, this is tremendous and reveals the weakened position of national governments when faced with such a mass manoeuvre. Within the European Community moving towards a single market, this trend was reinforced by the drastic reduction of the powers of the individual nation states without a corresponding increase in the powers of a European state, as if capital decided to reign without proxy.

Another development must be mentioned, though it seems too close to draw definite conclusions from it. I mean the end of the Cold War and German reunification putting an end to the alleged or real dependence of Germany on the American nuclear umbrella. Has Western Europe thus gained its unifier? Will the new Germany perform for the Common Market the role Prussia once played within the Zollverein?

Can Western Europe stand up to the United States without evolving a different kind of society? I have my doubts on the matter, but this is a subject for another discussion. Here it is enough to recall that reunification was one of the mainsprings behind the Maastricht Treaty, designed to harness the united Germany to the western union. The treaty itself was the logical completion of the whole process of integration, with the common currency and an independent central bank asserting the direct rule of money, while the meager social chapter confirmed that the rules would not be equal for capital and labor. The ratification process, with the awkward referenda in Denmark and France, revealed a surprising level of resistance, both nationalist and social, towards this Europe of big business. It certainly slowed down the march without really changing the direction. Maastricht and its convergence targets—for inflation, the public debt, the foreign deficit—has also been used to impose a deflationary policy in member countries. In Italy, for instance, this pressure has been a crucial factor in precipitating the tremendous political upheaval, which is still very far from finished. Italy, however, is only the extreme case and not the exception. Throughout Western Europe we are probably moving towards a political confrontation, with the problem of employment, or rather unemployment, at the heart of the conflict.

Understandably so. Within the European Economic Community the share of unemployed is averaging nearly 12 percent and almost double that figure, say, in Spain. And these are official data underestimating the real plight, which has come to stay. For a long period now, the boom years of the cycle do not bring about a clear recovery in employment, they merely interrupt for a while the relentless lengthening of the lines of the jobless. The phenomenon is no longer limited to the young, to the women, to the blue collar workers. It affects the whole population, including the middle classes. This may explain why it now hits the headlines of the European newspapers. What do you say of a system that can be fuelled by military expenditure but cannot expand through

increased spending on housing and health, culture and education? Something must be basically wrong with a society when you cannot tell whether an increase in productivity is a blessing or a curse.

A drastic reduction of working time is now the topic of debate and there is no doubt that we have the technical means for such a reform. Indeed, some writers connected with the ecological movement, Andre Gorz being a good example, have grasped the nature of our predicament, pointing out that we are at the stage, described prophetically by Marx in the *Grundrisse*, when "the theft of somebody else's labor time, on which wealth now rests, appears a miserable base" compared with the means at our disposal. To take "working time as the standard of wealth, Marx argued, is to base wealth on poverty . . . reducing time as a whole to working time and degrading the individual to the simple role of the working man, dominated by his labor." What in Marx's day was utopian is now realistic. If we take the advanced Western countries in isolation (which obviously one shouldn't, but I do here for the sake of the argument), we are already today technologically ripe for a transition towards a qualitatively different society in which, as he put it, "the surplus labor of the masses will no longer be the condition for the development of general wealth as the leisure of the few will cease to be the condition for the full development of the human brain."

And yet, in my opinion, even the writers aware of the nature of the new confrontation do not seem to go far enough. Because the time required to ensure the production for our material needs can be drastically reduced, they assume that one can leave that production in capitalist hands, obtain a dramatic cut in working hours through some mysterious legislation and thus allow society to organize itself differently. The snag is that capital has its logic and, if its reign is perpetuated in the factory and in the office, it will also prevail in society at large. The struggle is, therefore, over the form of organization and democracy from the shopfloor to the very top.

The way in which the talks over a shorter week—whether four-day, thirty-five, thirty-two, or thirty-hour—are carried illustrates the point. This is not the case of the labor unions imposing greater leisure and more choice for their members. It is the case of employers imposing, when it suits them, a shorter week with lower pay on reluctant employees, forced to accept a smaller pay packet in order to reduce the number of sackings. It is an attempt by the employers to pass on the cost of the crisis to the workers. Whether (on the national scale) they will really cut drastically the hours worked may be doubted, judging by precedents. Productivity has risen tremendously compared with prewar, the working week has gone down imperceptibly. The French workers, for instance, conquered the forty-hour week back in 1936 during the popular front and it is only now that they are supposed to dip below the thirty-nine hours. The manner in which the EEC adopted last month the rule that a forty-eight hour week is the maximum to be tolerated, with Britain protesting in the name of the “right to work”—translate: the right to be exploited—increases my doubts.

What is certain, on the other hand, is the employers' determination to get compensation for any reduction in the hours worked. They are trying to recover the concessions they were forced to make on their right to hire and fire. They want to weaken still further the power of the unions and of factory delegates, eliminate the minimum wage, and, following in Reagan's footsteps, spread the number of “working poor.” This, allegedly is the way to create jobs. But “wage flexibility” is not enough. Allegedly, Europe to compete and survive must cease living above its station, with a welfare state, a publicly paid universal health service, and other safety nets. This is why the coming confrontation is so vital. What is at stake is whether the working people of Europe will be more than ever appendices to the machine in a society based on profit or whether the associated producers, imposing a different logic, will start gaining mastery over their work and the organization of their society.

* * *

The crisis of the left was implicit in all that has been said so far. The collapse of the neo-Stalinist model (which should never have been connected with the left and had ceased to be so for some time) is too obvious to require comment. All one can say is that, because of verbal association, the regime has discredited the very word socialism for quite a period. That period, actually, may prove shorter than we thought as the people of Eastern Europe discover that life under capitalism is not as dazzling as suggested by the American serials, that the future they are being offered is neither British nor Swedish but Bolivian. It is to be hoped that the shock will spur them to seek a third way and not to look nostalgically towards the past.

The bankruptcy of the Social Democracy cannot be so taken for granted, even—especially—now that the Swedish Social Democrats, the French Socialists, and the British Labor Party are out of office. But first a word of definition for a concept with a very shifting meaning. Even between the two world wars, that is to say after the break-up of the Second International, the Social Democrats, at least in theory, still believed in the social ownership of the means of production, that is to say the abolition of the capitalist system. They simply claimed that this could be achieved gradually within existing institutions. Things have changed totally since the war. The French Socialists in 1981 were probably the last ones to pay lip service to a “break with capitalism.” Actually, for a long time, the Social Democrats had become the reforming managers of capitalist society and the problem now is with the adjective reformist.

The evolution of Social Democracy had a great deal to do with the period of unprecedented prosperity mentioned earlier. Those, you remember, were the years of fast rising wages and an expanding welfare state. With the national product rising rapidly, part of the profits could be passed on to the workers and why change the system within which you can make substantial progress? Indeed, with the illusions

about Russia as an alternative shattered—after Khrushchev's indictment of Stalin, the invasion of Hungary, and the crushing of the Czech Spring in 1968—even the Communist Parties, headed by the Italian, got converted to the doctrine of capitalism as the only possible horizon.

The snag was that they opted for the so-called “historical compromise” when it had ceased to correspond to the historical phase, when the foundations on which it had rested were crumbling. A compromise is a matter of mutual concessions and the labor movement could claim quite a number of achievements. Now it was to be all give and no take. While the left, moving towards the center, was opting for class collaboration, the radicalized right issued a call to class war. The position was particularly awkward for parties in office. The French Socialists took over in 1981 full of projects for reform. Two years later they were the staunch defenders of the franc, leading the country into mass unemployment in the name of financial orthodoxy.

The failures of the European labor movement can be easily documented. The dramatic drop in union membership is not only due to the restructuring of its strongholds in coal, steel, or the shipyards. For years the leadership of the unions failed to take into account the fast changing structure of the labor force, the massive inflow of women and immigrant workers. Then, accepting the logic of the employers, it was always on the defensive and, in the present crisis, it seems cornered. In addition, if it sticks to national boundaries, while capital moves across frontiers, it is doomed. The political shortfalls of the established left, of what the French call *la gauche respectueuse*, are even more obvious. It is enough to recall that all the genuine movements of the last quarter of a century—the youth rebellion of 1968, women's liberation, the ecological movement—have grown outside the traditional left and often against it.

And yet the word bankruptcy may have been too strong or premature. A more accurate image for the state of the western left would be one in which all the elements of insol-

vency have been gathered but the final warrant has not been signed. The current crisis could seal its fate. Now, to preserve the compromise it must accept the attack against all the postwar conquests of the working class, including the welfare state. No wonder that in recent months the British Labor Party, the French Socialists, the former Communists of the Italian PDS have asked themselves whether they should not follow the model of the American Democratic Party. The question is whether in their relationship with the system the left-wing parties are still negotiating partners or mere transmission belts.

The European left is at crossroads. A quarter of a century ago, amid much turmoil, the protest movement raised a series of key questions: growth? but which growth? for whose sake? for whose profit? for what purpose? for what kind of society and within which environment? It did not answer them, let me insist, it only raised them. These are questions that the left must put back on the agenda in search of a real alternative. Otherwise the left, in the traditional acceptance of this word in Europe, will disappear as part of the Americanization of our continent.

* * *

Before concluding I still have time for a few remarks:

If rational, progressive, universalist solutions are not offered, irrational, reactionary, and jingoist ones will take their place. It is already happening, with the rise of Le Pen's National Front in France, of neo-nazis in Germany, of the Lombard League and now the neofascist MSI in Italy. The seriousness of that danger is connected with the gravity of the economic crisis and this is why I am even more perturbed by the prospect of nationalist revival in Eastern Europe, where not only living standards have dropped but the whole social fabric is torn.³ Echoes of bloody battles from the confines of the ex-Soviet Union, from the Caucasus to Tadjikistan, are a reminder that horror is not limited to Yugoslavia, that it can spread.

Secondly, what happens in one half of Europe has an impact in the other. In the 1980s the reactionary winds blowing from the West and the East reinforced one another. I am convinced that if the leadership of Solidarity could convert, eight years later, a movement which started in 1980-1981 as an egalitarian expression of the working class into a sort of Robin Hood in reverse, robbing the poor to give to the rich, it had something to do with the Thatcherite influences coming from the West and the failure of the Mitterand experiment in France. It is to be hoped that the opposite will also prove true, that progressive trends will also reinforce one another and, in particular, will help the East Europeans to search for a third way. What both sides need at the moment is no new model, heaven forbid, but an example, a proof that we are not living in a world without alternative.

It is the logic of our time
No subject for eternal verse
That we who lived by honest dreams
Defend the bad against the worse. . .

Thus the British poet, Cecil Day-Lewis, some time after the first war. The message, however, fits our time. We vote for Labor against Tories in Britain, for the left against the right in France or Italy with a bitter taste in our mouth. Did you notice in your struggle over NAFTA, as we did over Maastricht, how easy it was to find oneself with strange bedfellows, how important to put one's opposition in its context, to couple the rejection with a proposal based on entirely different premises. What the left now requires above all is such a global project, a vision of the future, what I would call a realistic utopia. After so many pledges broken and dreams shattered, no movement will now embark on a long, historical journey without knowing where it is aiming at and how it hopes to get there.

How can such a project be elaborated democratically, and not handed down as a blueprint for obedient rank-and-file, what should it contain, what agonizing reappraisals will it

involve—all these questions go well beyond my present purpose. They are not particularly European. They are universal. They are part of our common, unfinished struggle for a radically different society. And so I shall conclude with a warning. Ours is a race against the clock in a double sense. We must stage holding operations, prevent the worst from happening and thus blocking the horizon. We must also use the time thus gained to allow the social forces to reawaken politically and to reinvent an alternative. Only thus shall we be able to avoid a barbarian future.

NOTES

1. And confirmed by the December poll in Russia, when the committed advocates of shock therapy regrouped in Russia's Choice headed by Yegor Gaidar obtained 15.4 percent of the national vote in the elections to the Duma.
2. Since then, as the result of the election, they have both resigned from the government.
3. The 22.8 percent of the vote in Russia's December 1993 election by Vladimir Zhirinovsky's jingoist, xenophobic "Liberal Democrats" is a symptom of that danger.

(Continued from inside back cover.)

for the whole country will be thrown wide open, and the chances of single payer will be greatly improved everywhere.

Perhaps even more important, a victory in California might precipitate the kind of turning point in the political mood of the country some of us have long been hoping for, from pessimism and paralysis to renewed faith in the possibilities of democratic struggle.

In the Notes from the Editors in the May issue, we included an item about the death of Thorstein Veblen's daughter Becky Meyers, in which we wrote that Veblen finished his academic career teaching at Stanford in the late 1920s. An alert reader points out that this is an error. Veblen's teaching stint at Stanford was much earlier and was followed by periods at the University of Missouri and The New School for Social Research. What we should have said is that after fini-

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OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND WRONGS: CHINA AND THE UNITED STATES

by ROBERT WEIL

The March visit of Secretary of State Warren Christopher to Beijing, calling on the Chinese government to improve its human rights record under the threat of denying it renewal of Most Favored Nation trade status, ended in fiasco. It should hardly have come as a surprise. After a semester teaching at a university and a month travelling in China, the attitudes and conditions I observed make clear why the U.S. human rights policy toward that nation was virtually certain to be rejected. Conversations with Chinese, most of whom were students, showed that the effort of the U.S. government to act as the enforcer of universal standards in their country is meeting not only with official rejection, but with very strong popular opposition. An understanding of this reaction requires altering the perspective from which the issue is commonly approached in the United States, and questioning the very definition of human rights that prevails here. To do so reveals that the United States has as much to learn from the Chinese in this area, as vice versa. These "lessons" for the United States in regard to human rights are similar to the ones being voiced across Asia, from Japan to Singapore. But in China, they also draw on the experience of decades of socialist revolution.

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The 150 or so graduate students that my wife and I taught were from the very “Tiananmen generation” that filled U.S. television screens with their anti-government protests in 1989, ending in the terrible events of June 3 and 4 and the continuing repression of dissidents down to today. These young people keenly felt the restrictions placed on their ability to communicate freely and to influence the policies of their country. It was all the more striking, therefore, that among these students support for the Chinese government in its showdown with the United States over human rights was both widespread and intense. In our many discussions of this issue both inside and outside class, not a single student voiced anything but opposition—often with great anger—to the prospect of the United States applying economic sanctions to China. Indeed, it was on this subject, more than once, that the most passive and seemingly apolitical students, or those most attracted to Western culture, suddenly spoke up forcefully. Given this indication of popular backing of official policy among the very group where it might be expected to be weakest, it was virtually a given that China would stonewall the United States on this issue.

To understand the apparent anomalies of this situation, it is necessary to look carefully at the Chinese attitude on human rights, especially in relation to the United States and the world community. Most treatments of this question in the U.S. media, paralleled by the stand of leading organizations active in this area, simply parrot the administration position that the Chinese government is a major violator of international standards, with the only debate being over which forms of pressure are most appropriate and likely to bring about necessary changes. This view assumes that the United States stands for universal values, and that it has the right to serve as their global enforcer in China. By extension, much is made of the supposed “conflict” between the U.S. government and certain multinational corporations, who are said to put business interests above the need for human rights in dealing with the Chinese. That the United States might actually have some-

thing positive to learn from China on this issue does not even arise for those who start from this perspective.

The occasional effort to be sensitive to opposing Chinese attitudes on human rights usually takes the form of noting that China does not have a history of Western-style political democracy and individual liberties. But this still leaves China defined in essentially negative terms, as simply lacking what we have. Even more infrequently, mention is made of the Chinese assertion that national sovereignty and economic justice must also be part of the human rights agenda, but these are almost never explored in depth, the implication being left that they are of lesser value, and perhaps advanced by the Chinese government only as a cover, to deflect attention from its problems with "real" human rights. The corollary, sometimes stated openly, at other times implied, is that the U.S. quarrel is only with the authorities in Beijing, it being assumed that the people of China share opposition to their government on this issue and would welcome intervention from outside.

Our Chinese students did indeed voice human rights complaints, the most frequent of which concerned the lack of greater freedom of speech and of a non-governmental press. They were clearly distressed that there were no regular channels through which government policies could be openly criticized, much less changed. In all probability, these concerns overlay even deeper fears that were not necessarily exposed to us as temporary foreign visitors. But these students nevertheless offered strong support for the three primary objections raised by the government of China to the attempt of the United States to impose its human rights conception on others.

First is the problem of a double standard. Leaving aside U.S. creation of and support for some of the worst violators of human rights in the world, such as the Guatemalan military regime, the Chinese question the practices of the United States itself. Tiananmen? How about Panama City six months later? Tibet? What about Puerto Rico? Refusal to accept universal international standards? But the United States itself

stonewalled the World Court ruling to pay reparations to Nicaragua. Police repression? All our students had seen Rodney King beaten on TV and the widespread destruction that followed. Political dissidents? A short list for the United States would have to include Leonard Peltier, Puerto Rican *independentistas*, and the black victims of COINTELPRO imprisoned, murdered, or driven into exile. Prison labor? While we were in China, the press was reporting on the growing U.S. export of goods produced by prisoners. None of these parallels are exact, and any given student was usually familiar with only some of them. But all knew enough about these and other similar situations that, whatever their own attitude toward Chinese human rights, they believed strongly that the United States comes with filthy hands, hypocrisy and arrogance to the role of global enforcer in their country.

China also insists that national sovereignty is just as much an issue of human rights as are individual liberties. Thus the very attempt of the United States to impose its will on the Chinese is seen as violating their human right to self-determination. As an immensely old and proud culture, now attempting to regain its position as a global leader, China sees the current human rights pressure from the West as just one more attempt to “civilize” the Chinese, right in line with the missionaries, opium, and gunboats of old. Thus our students were deeply suspicious that human rights too is being used as an imperialist weapon to keep China down. They put it in the same category as the denial of the Chinese Olympic bid, and the sudden last-minute passion of the Hong Kong authorities for “democracy” after 150 years of appointed colonial government and just three years before reversion to China. Citing such conflicts as the “Yinhe” freighter incident last fall in which the United States falsely claimed the Chinese were shipping military chemicals to Iran, many spoke bitterly of the self-appointed role of the United States as “global policeman.”

But the most critical issue, and the one most relevant to progressives and the left in the United States, is the basic question of what kind of “human rights” are considered

universal standards. We lived in a northeast Chinese industrial and university city of 2 million people, only now beginning to feel the full effects of the “marketization” policies of the government. Still, following earlier socialist principles, workers in the local auto factories were paid approximately twice as much as most of the faculty at our school. Despite a very low general economic level there were no homeless, and in four and a half months, we saw two people with physical problems begging at the local temple, and what seemed like a single “bag lady.” When the weather turned bitter cold, a couple more adult beggars showed up in the downtown tunnels. But we never saw a single child beg, or so much as ask a stranger for candy or chewing gum. There was practically no crime, and women walked freely alone at night. Having lived in and around New York City, I was particularly struck by the way people moved down the generally dark streets without checking out who was approaching them, even from behind. Our students enjoyed a virtually free education, including at the graduate level, and looked forward to guaranteed jobs, with health care and housing, remnants of the socialist system. Indeed about half of them came directly to the university from work units.

Despite the emphasis in the United States on governmental domination of China, we began to feel there what “civil” society means. For those living and working in such an environment, the idea that a vastly wealthy country like the United States, with several dozen billionaires, but in which millions are unemployed and without health insurance and hundreds of thousands live homeless on the streets, where teenagers routinely murder each other and bystanders with automatic weapons fighting over drugs, and even children carry guns to primary school, where the rate of incarceration is higher than in South Africa and there are 2,500 on death row, but crime is so rampant that entire communities cower at night behind security devices and strangers are shot just for knocking on the wrong door, where women have to try to “take back the night”. . . that such a country can serve as the

global enforcer of universal human rights seemed simply ludicrous.

For these students, what was hardest of all to understand was why African-Americans and Latinos have to periodically burn down the centers of major cities to call attention to their never-ending oppression and poverty. Over and over, I was asked why the U.S. government does not do something to end these conditions. While their own view of the Chinese treatment of minority nationalities was undoubtedly too rosy, their attitudes at least reflected the official line that the non-Han peoples are equals and that their regions should receive special economic advantages on the road to development. Raised in a system with a socialist conception of governmental activism and a media that constantly presents positive images of minorities, the idea that any society would allow a problem like the U.S. "inner cities" to fester endlessly without any serious attempt to address it on the national level was beyond their ken.

In trying to explain this gap in social perception and policy, my most effective method was to read them the *New York Times* article from a few years back concerning a court ruling that the homeless in Grand Central Station had the right to beg, but only because they were protected under the free speech provisions of the First Amendment. As it turned out, even this freedom proved less sacrosanct than the right of corporate commuters not to have to look into the faces of the human wreckage the U.S. capitalist system produces, and the decision was soon reversed. My students, nevertheless, got the point: that in the United States there is no human rights guarantee against starvation, homelessness, unemployment, or lack of health care, only the political freedom to protest – sometimes – that one is starving, homeless, jobless, or dying. As much as they themselves yearned for greater freedom to speak, write, and complain freely, the U.S. "tradeoff" of political for economic rights did not strike these students as particularly attractive, and it certainly did not represent for them a standard of universal justice.

In this same vein, when I once remarked to one of my classes that I felt much freer talking openly about socialist concepts with them than I ever had in a classroom in the United States, one student replied, only half-jokingly: "At least in China, we can discuss both socialism and capitalism." Still, many of them made clear that they envied the human right to speak relatively more freely that, as a U.S. citizen, they believed I enjoyed. I assured them that, having accepted the teaching position in China in large measure because I lacked regular employment and adequate health coverage for myself and my family in the United States, and that I would soon return to the same conditions (as indeed I have), the envy flowed both ways. The idea that the freedom to complain about joblessness and no medical coverage is a fundamental human right, but that jobs and health care are not, seemed ridiculous in China.

Our students, like the Chinese government, raised a fourth aspect of human rights in arguing against the U.S. position, perhaps the most crucial of all in their eyes at the present time. This is the right of Third World countries to rise from the poverty and subordination to which the imperialist economic system has consigned them. For the Chinese, this has become an overriding goal, in the pursuit of which other rights can and must for now be restricted. They speak of greater political democratization emerging in time from an expanding economy, in a mirror image of the United States claim that all economic problems can ultimately be solved through the normal channels of politics. Both positions may be equally specious. But there is no fundamental reason why either claim should be privileged over the other as a basis for global human rights standards, and China refuses to recognize any such arbitrary assertion. Any idea that the rapidly expanding economy might have to be slowed down to accommodate political democratization did not have much appeal, and attempts to enforce such a view from outside were once again met by our students with suspicion that they are only meant to hold China back.

Almost without exception, these young people insisted that the Chinese system is still socialist and that it should remain so. While they generally expressed support for many of the current "market reforms" of the government, and were eager to participate in the new consumer society, they at the same time indicated deep misgivings about the growing economic polarization in China, and the massive invasion of foreign investors. With over one billion people, and a GNP per capita still at Third World levels, they believed that a move to full capitalism in their society would be a disaster, generating dislocations completely beyond social control. Added to this was a nationalist pride and a determination to see China once again become a powerful world player, which fueled resentment at any foreign effort, political, economic, or cultural, to keep the Chinese forever "second rank" within the current global system.

Nor, least of all, do they view what is happening in the former Soviet Bloc as a model. Contrary to the widely-held image of Chinese students in the United States, the only time I sensed real terror in their voices was, not when they talked about their own government, but when they spoke of the possibility that their country might slide into the economic collapse, social anarchy, and regional conflicts of the former Soviet Union. Much of the support they expressed for the official policy rested on this deeply rooted fear of a breakdown in society, one as ancient as the period of national disintegration and anarchic conditions which produced the Confucian concept of social order 2,500 years ago, and as recent as the Cultural Revolution. The idea that outside forces, such as the United States through its human rights pressure, might help push their country too into such a state of turmoil was completely abhorrent.

It is against this background that the "conflict" between the U.S. government and business community over the issue of human rights in China must be approached. In the eyes of those Chinese who express critical support for a system they still see as socialistic, this is a falling out among thieves. Both

the U.S. government and business community have exactly the same goal, the destruction of whatever remains of socialism in China and its conversion into a Western-dominated capitalist country. They are equal in their determination to undermine the economic securities and elements of social justice that are the human rights legacy of the socialist revolution. They only disagree on how to do it. In fact, the U.S. administration itself is primarily caught between two sets of conflicting corporate interests: those who are motivated by the short-term greed for profits through doing business with the Chinese, versus those who fear the growing economic power of China and are driven by the desire to destroy a potential rival, a goal in pursuit of which the human rights issue is just one more convenient tool.

The only "human right" which either the U.S. government or business community has ever consistently fought for is the freedom for some to make capitalist profit off the exploitation and misery of others. Toward this end there is no violation of human rights they have not been willing to commit or condone, no democratically-elected government they have not been prepared to overthrow, no socialist society they have not striven to destroy. Only when it fits this larger agenda does the issue of political freedom and civil liberties get raised, and only very selectively at that. Perfectly expressing this relation, a "compromise" position has now been floated by the Clinton administration and some in Congress, and backed by exiled dissidents such as Fang Lizhi, in which only state-owned enterprises in China would be subject to trade sanctions, to "encourage the private sector". . . and reduce the impact on American business and on places like Hong Kong and Taiwan" (*New York Times*, March 30, 1994, p. A10). Given the hypocrisy and cynicism of this approach, it is hardly wild speculation to suggest that, should China become fully capitalistic, "human rights" of any kind there would rapidly disappear as a United States concern.

Faced with such a choice of U.S. "friends," many Chinese adopt a "curse on all your houses" stand. They are concerned

with making their own society, which today at least is still officially “socialist,” work better. This certainly includes developing new forms of democratic expression and decision-making. But there is no reason to believe that the best forms of the latter for China are those which were developed in parallel with Western capitalism. As that country knows only too well, any attempt to achieve the simultaneous implementation of human rights in the areas of political freedoms, economic development, and social justice is extremely difficult. The Chinese have had as much and as painful experience with these interlocking struggles as any people on the globe. It behooves the rest of the world, including the United States, to approach them with an attitude of respect and humility, and in the posture of student as much as teacher.

The Chinese government is itself now moving rapidly to dismantle those human rights in which it has hitherto excelled, including full employment, guaranteed housing and health care, and a free educational system through the university level. Travelling from our university to the Southern areas which have gone furthest in “marketization” starkly revealed the effects of this abandonment. The peasant-worker families living in the open and the packs of begging street children who can now be found at the railroad station in Guangzhou attest to the “success” of these “reforms.” But they are just the most visible tip of the iceberg, with skyrocketing crime, corruption, and industrial accidents, which last year alone killed 60,000 workers. The government itself estimates that there are already 100 million peasants at economic loose ends, and 20 million more wandering the country looking for work, with unemployment rapidly growing in the cities. No whimpers of disapproval will of course emanate from Washington or Wall Street over these violations of human rights. They will in fact greet such phenomena as welcome evidence that China is moving toward a “free” labor market, which is the *sine qua non* of capitalist exploitation, and that the Chinese government is rapidly accepting “Western values,” at least in its economic system.

Yet here, too, recognition must be accorded to the deep poverty still evident in much of China, and the success in gross economic terms of the current “marketization” policies. The difficulty of achieving rapid development while maintaining social justice is a contradiction which the Chinese must also be free to sort out by themselves. As they do so, they ask only that the United States and the rest of the world approach the issue of human rights in a spirit of mutual respect and learning. For the U.S. government, on the other hand, the right to define which human rights get stressed and enforced is the essence of what it means to be the dominant global power, one more tool in its control of the international system. It is no more willing to accept an equality of exchange on this question, than in any other relation to China or the rest of the world.

The form of political freedoms and civil liberties advanced by the United States, valuable as they may be, represent only “one-third” of a truly global human rights agenda, which must also include national sovereignty and economic justice. There was once a time, beginning with the Declaration of Independence, when the first of these was recognized as coequal with and inseparable from political liberty in the United States, at least in theory. But the United States has long since become the most consistent and universal invader of the national sovereignty of other countries, and has lost any claim to represent human rights on this issue.

As for economic justice and an end to class exploitation, it never was, and never can be, part of the U.S. agenda for human rights under its present system. Imagine the U.S. government canceling MFN status for Brazil because children there have to search for food in garbage dumps in order to survive. The idea is too laughable even to contemplate. For the United States, freedom from being tortured in prison is a “human right,” but the daily torture of poverty and hunger is just business as usual. Even more beyond the pale is the idea that China or any other country could successfully use trade rights to force the United States to show “overall, significant

progress" in providing every adult worker with a decent job or guaranteeing inner city children the same opportunities as others in the society, much less ending its imperialist intervention in other countries. To truly implement such changes, with all that they imply, would be as basic a threat to those who run the U.S. system as human rights critics claim political democracy would be to the authorities in Beijing. It is questionable if even the democratic practices of the United States itself would survive any serious attempt to bring about such a fundamental revolution in its social order.

The idea that "human rights" can be reduced to political freedoms and civil liberties is to denigrate humanity itself, and says infinitely more about the United States than it ever can about China. Yet we in the United States have been taught our whole lives that we are "free" because of these limited conceptions, which do not even include such basic democratic powers as control over the corporations that completely dominate our economy. The Chinese experience teaches once again that there is more than this to humanity and a decent society. Nor are such lessons limited to China. After the recent murder of two Japanese students in a carjacking near Los Angeles, a television commentator in Japan was quoted as saying "It's a great thing that the United States raises human rights issues in its diplomatic policy. But the most important human right is not to be killed." (*New York Times*, March 29, 1994, p. B7) Until the United States is willing to accept alternative concepts of human rights, from Asians and others, it is bound to fail in its attempts to influence China, and the efforts to address the needs of our own society will end in even greater failure. From the Chinese, in particular, there are aspects to be learned from Asian forms of societal organization, with their emphasis on collective responsibilities and supports, merged with and transformed by socialist revolutionary practice.

If tomorrow word came that the students that we taught were out on the streets in a new wave of protests, it would not surprise me at all. As the contradictions of "reform" deepen, there is a rising tension in China, under the apparently calm

surface. But it is just as likely that Chinese students, workers, and peasants would be out fighting against the loss of human rights that we in the United States have never had, as to win those we sometimes have and they lack. Indeed, as history has amply demonstrated, China may come up with revolutionary answers to its social problems that go far beyond anything we in the United States can even dream of at this time. The lessons in human rights we should be learning from the Chinese even now, may in the near future be added to in ways that break new ground not only for China, but for the United States and the rest of the world.

(Continued from inside back cover.)

clearly than in the earlier one, is between corporate capital and the people, using this term in a very wide sense. And more is at stake than this particular issue. If the proponents succeed in California, the problem of healthcare for the whole country will be thrown wide open, and the chances of single payer will be greatly improved everywhere.

Perhaps even more important, a victory in California might precipitate the kind of turning point in the political mood of the country some of us have long been hoping for, from pessimism and paralysis to renewed faith in the possibilities of democratic struggle.

In the Notes from the Editors in the May issue, we included an item about the death of Thorstein Veblen's daughter Becky Meyers, in which we wrote that Veblen finished his academic career teaching at Stanford in the late 1920s. An alert reader points out that this is an error. Veblen's teaching stint at Stanford was much earlier and was followed by periods at the University of Missouri and The New School for Social Research. What we should have said is that after finishing his academic career, Veblen returned to Palo Alto where he died in 1928.

It is with great sorrow that we inform our readers of the death at age seventy of Ralph Miliband. *Monthly Review* readers know of Ralph through his many contributions to MR. A memorial article will appear in a future issue. He will be greatly missed.

BOOKS

Progress and Power Post-Industrial Style

by Robert Engler

The Assassination of New York by Robert Fitch. London and New York: Verso, 1993. 293 pp. \$29.95

The Assassination of New York is not a suspense whodunit. From the outset sociologist Robert Fitch is explicit in identifying the targets of his indictment. In the lineup appear investment bankers; very large property owners and developers; railroad, insurance, and foundation executives; and the specialists in architecture, housing, and planning who serve them. With David and Nelson Rockefeller, backed by various family funds, as contemporary ringleaders, these figures are seen as possessing "the social cohesiveness of a Millsian elite. And the shared economic focus of a Marxist class."

Two decades of sleuthing by the author unearth documents which, he submits, lay bare the basic intentions of the defendants. The Regional Plan of 1929 and its successor in 1968 were comprehensive studies, complete with before and after maps, which highlighted what they were determined the new New York and its environs ultimately should look like. Although there were significant differences, both were concerned with the most advantageous uses of space. The first plan emphasized the location of highways, bridges (but not mass transit), parks, and other elements of land-use planning which would implement the vision of a decentralized future and who should live where in metropolitan New York. The second plan, favoring a more centralized design, stressed the projections and preferences for the development of Manhattan. The

Robert Engler is author of *The Politics of Oil* and *The Brotherhood of Oil*.

two sets of studies were drafted by the Regional Plan Association on whose board sat representatives of the power forces cited by Fitch. These scenarios are central to his charge that the unchanging target *has been the dismantling of the industrial base of the city's mixed economy*, including the port activities which had been integral to its history and growth. In its place a white-collar structure was to emerge as dominant. This would function as the electronic command post of what subsequently became known as "post-industrial society." Fitch concludes that to a striking degree the region has taken on the form and focus championed by this planning elite. He is outraged by the undemocratic nature of this planning and by the crippling social costs which have been shifted to much of the public.

The great variety of interdependent enterprises in such trades as garment-making, printing, and machinery had once kept the city's economy vibrant and resilient. Small plants had the flexibility to innovate. Many of the products were not standardized and required an intelligent and skilled labor force. The docks brought raw materials and employment. Hops for local breweries came by freight cars on the lighters which used to ply the waters of the port, since the rail freight lines from the west terminated on the New Jersey shore of the Hudson River. Fitch insists that he is not romanticizing this past. There was poverty among exploited workers whose lives were frequently bound by hazardous sweatshops and unhealthy tenements. But there also was opportunity to rise out of these circumstances. And the city generated sufficient revenue to support a network of public hospitals, free higher education, and other services.

Why would Fitch's assassins put out a contract on an economy that was working and keeping them in power? Why would they want to relocate or close down factories, shift the port facilities to New Jersey, and pulverize neighborhoods of Gotham's labor force? Because, the author argues, they had something far more rewarding in mind. Their city of the future was to be built upon the control and exchange of information and knowledge as well as capital. These were the long-run keys to wealth and dominance in a global economy.

Towering office buildings would house many more higher paid employees than did factories and at far greater rentals per square foot. Public subsidies and investment could be obtained from a pliant political system, thus minimizing private risk in the name of progress and the public good. The twin towers ("David" and "Nelson") of the World Trade Center were built by the Port Authority,

a regional public agency. These skyscrapers displaced some 30,000 small business people and blue collar workers in what had been the electrical supply district. Established neighborhoods were destroyed and their residents scattered. Urban renewal, as often noted, meant urban removal, without consulting the displaced. One recalls accounts of the reactions of people living in the projected path of the Cross Bronx Expressway (part of the circumferential highway network conceived by the planners) which was drawn through their densely populated communities. They felt frightened and powerless. When asked what might finally stop the bulldozers, one woman replied that Eleanor Roosevelt wouldn't let it happen.

Marshall Berman offers a sensitive interpretation of such construction and its impact in his review of Robert Caro's *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*.¹ Fitch, however, believes that the bureaucratic arrogance of Moses made it easy for critics such as Caro to exaggerate the importance of New York's master builder in reshaping the metropolitan area. "The scapegoat for two decades of planning failures," he "simply poured the concrete on the dotted lines" of the earlier plans.

A statement by the chief economist of the Regional Plan Association in one of its research reports in 1927 leaves little ambiguity as to the values behind the maps and charts:

Some of the poorest people live in conveniently located slums on high-priced land. On patrician Fifth Avenue, Tiffany and Woolworth, cheek by jowl, offer jewels and gimcracks from substantially identical sites. Childs restaurants thrive where Delmonico's withered and died. A stone's throw from the stock exchange the air is filled with the aroma of roasting coffee; a few hundred feet from Times Square, with the stench of slaughter houses. In the very heart of the "commercial" city on Manhattan Island south of 58th Street, the inspectors in 1922 found nearly 420,000 workers employed in factories. Such a situation outrages one's sense of order. Everything seems misplaced. One yearns to rearrange the hodgepodge and put things where they belong.

Luxury housing and amenities attractive to executives and professionals replaced more modest Manhattan dwellings and their lively (and, as Jane Jacobs added, safer) streets and neighborhoods. Battery Park City, an expensive residential enclave within walking distance of the financial center, was built with the assistance of public land and dollars.² Sporadic cries of "welfare for the rich" and "socialism" were muted in the face of the handsome public walks and park strips along the waterfront. The new high-rises with spectacular views of the harbor that was New York's glory and meal ticket thus helped to confuse public memory of what had been there

before. Urban planning, as we know it, concludes Fitch, is "the coordination of land monopoly."

Fitch refuses to invoke the conventional generalizations of "global forces" and "technological imperatives" as adequate explanations for these socioeconomic transformations. Instead, in order to demystify the power affecting so much of daily life he names individuals and institutions. He rejects treating politics as a spectator sport, a competition of limited alternatives where observers, including journalists and political scientists as well as participants focus upon personalities and voting analyses. Meanwhile, the power forces heavily influence what is not open for debate as well as what is in the formal political arena occupied by Tweedledum and Tweedledee. For the author, programs to revitalize the city's economy in ways which tackle conditions of inequality must be integral to any legitimate platform.

In places the book's strengths call attention to its weaknesses. One appreciates the reminder by Fitch that it was specific business and financial leaders who made the critical decisions as to the directions for technological development and application. But an expanded discussion of these choices might tell us more about the motivations behind them. For example, to what extent has containerization led to the decline in dock employment, and the increased ability of larger aircraft to fly long distances at great speed hastened the disappearance of the transatlantic ocean liners which once contributed substantially to the vitality of New York? Are the pushers for "efficiency" through mechanization in banks, telephone centers, and the post office explained sufficiently by Regional Plan Association blueprints for closing down the industrial city? Does the movement of garment and printing plants away from the region bear some relation to the search by management to escape union wage costs and remain competitive? Are the dramatic drops in industrial production and employment unique to New York? What about the experiences of Philadelphia, Chicago, and other older urban areas in the United States, England, and Western Europe? Fitch does acknowledge the current drive to downsize corporate operations in order to ensure solvency. Indeed, near the end of the book he suggests that the giants are increasingly worried about survival. But throughout he maintains that the magnitude of the employment downturn would be far less were it not for the overall planning objective to transform the economy.

An examination of the displacement of the trolley car from the streets of New York, although not discussed by Fitch, is relevant

here. As Bradford Snell demonstrated in a heavily documented study and in a number of lawsuits against General Motors, Standard Oil of California, and several other corporations, there was an orchestrated campaign to create a nationwide climate of opinion hostile to the continued existence of urban electric rail systems.³ They were technologically obsolete and clogged traffic, it was charged. Replacement of the streetcar by buses and private automobiles would further modernization of the city. Planners and citizens appeared to accept this judgment. And so, despite the greater energy efficiency and environmental cleanliness of the electric trolley, tracks were torn up in New York and many other cities. It is fascinating to note that currently plans are well underway to restore such service, including across 42nd Street. Of course the projected system now advocated by experts as ecologically sound is not called a trolley; it is "mass light rail transit."

One may also ask whether multinational corporations are responding primarily to the planning indicators of the Regional Plan Association or the marching orders of the Rockefeller-led gang when they shift production and distribution facilities away from the region. Or is it to their own profit calculations for increasing access to raw materials, amenable labor, and newer markets? It may be too much to expect from one author in a single volume research on a number of cities (and corporations) in a depth comparable to this study of New York. But given his earlier invocation of a "Millsian elite" and a "Marxist class structure," one wishes Fitch had returned to a discussion which related his findings about business and politics in New York decision making to the overall structures of class and power in the United States. By not doing so, he opens himself to the charge that his interpretation of power in the city flirts with a conspiracy theory. More to the immediate point, greater clarity about the locus of power would help one to sort out which problems can be defined and perhaps begun to be tackled at the local level and which require a broader approach.

This reviewer would like to have heard more frequently and directly from Fitch's powerholders, not so much for balance as for another dimension of insight into their thinking. Perhaps they genuinely believed that they have been doing the right thing, that what is good for banks and real estate is good for New York. One suspects that profits and progress are not incompatible in their minds. Certainly "trickle down" has been accepted economic wisdom in business quarters. How would the Rockefellers, the Tischs, or the Zeckendorfs respond to descriptions of themselves as killers?

One attempt to imagine such voices is found in Robert Nichols' comic novel *From the Steam Room*.⁴ Prominent among his characters are investment bankers from New York and the World Bank who worry, in their fashion, about the descent into bankruptcy of New York, Zaire, and comparable spots around the globe. While no less acquisitive than their counterparts in the Fitch study, they manage to exchange poems with one another and translate Beaudelaire, without neglecting *Barron's* or the *Financial Times*. We glimpse moments when their lives intersect with the people down under—waiters, elevator operators, women handball players, bath house attendants, car strippers, and other deconstructionists. Dwellers in the underdeveloped Lower East Side, the latter struggle to survive at the margins of the new post-industrial city with noisy and often humorous desperation.

Fitch is certainly on solid ground in looking at the price tag for the glittering technocratic utopia. Speculative overbuilding of office space stimulated by public subsidies; inadequate residential housing for people of moderate and middle incomes; the decimation of skilled work (how much of the vaunted computer and other white-collar work is repetitious and requires limited skill? how different are the lives of these employees than those in the old industrial order?); decreased opportunity for employment for young people; inadequate resources earmarked for schools; high welfare rolls; an eroded tax base; heightened racial tensions; increased crime; and a greater polarization between rich and poor.

Nevertheless, the title, *The Assassination of New York*, is misleading. The planning for a service economy is not the only reason for New York's similarities to the grimmer features of the Third World. Nor is the shame of the city an overnight phenomenon. The attrition of small-scale manufacturing, the physical and fiscal neglect and deterioration, and the dying of neighborhoods have taken place over many years. And despite the litany of downward development, New York retains extraordinary vitality and promise which continue to attract and hold many of its people.

While Fitch forgoes any celebration of these latter qualities, he concludes with a series of proposals for halting the decline, thus suggesting that he does not take the title of his own book literally. The challenge then is not resurrection but regeneration.

The heart of his agenda is to reclaim the city for its people. A first step is to reclaim the land. New York is not Chiapas and his purpose is to create the physical room and the environment for reindustrialization. He does not want another form of branch-plant

economy to spring up in the newly acquired space: what he seeks is a restoration of what was once healthy—an essentially diversified economy in which needed goods and services are produced by skilled workers in locally controlled businesses. There are many other related proposals, including a bank for development which would fund such enterprises and cooperatives. Rebuilding the port and a rail network to support it has a high priority as does stimulating the construction industry through programs for building affordable housing and for maintaining public structures. He advocates the privatization of such inappropriate public burdens as the World Trade Center and a review of subsidies which primarily enhance the powerful and the privileged. Institutions in the non-profit sector, including foundations and universities, control substantial property and wealth in New York. Combined, their budgets exceed that of the city's government. Fitch views them as exerting a strong influence on public policy, including the pursuit of the post-industrial grail. His recommendation: add them to the tax rolls.

The calls for change are thoughtful and worthy of closer examination. As they stand, they tend to be sketchy and may invite the unsympathetic to dismiss them as “looking backward.” One wants to learn more about taking back municipal land. It is a concept, although somewhat different, reminiscent of the approach of Henry George in *Progress and Poverty* in 1880 to the seeming paradox of a society discovering how to produce prodigious wealth while unable or unwilling to stem the mass economic distress accompanying this growth. George sought to challenge through taxation the assumption that land and increases in its value could simply be treated as private property at the disposal of the owner. How might Fitch's land bank work? What might one discover from other land bank experiments? Is there a reasonable expectation that a properly funded land bank would foster a mixed economy of sufficient dimension to revitalize the city? Or would it encourage, somewhat haphazardly, scattered businesses while the dominant corporate patterns remain?

Perhaps the greatest vulnerability of the book is in its ambition. Fitch has opened a set of questions, beginning with the underlying dynamics of capitalism. He is also asking how does society transform power relationships so that the economy and the political system become more inclusive and responsive to a broader definition of the public. He makes no reference to and presumably has little faith in the society evolving or being steered in such a direction by the rulers of its political economy. (In contrast, Lincoln Steffens, a

noted predecessor of Fitch who observed power in New York and other cities and countries, found himself highly attracted to the intelligent determination of the financial and political bosses who dominated in his time. He speculated as to whether the drive of these "bad" men could be harnessed to socially "good" ends.⁵)

Communism and Social Democracy, as they are generally conceived of today, receive only passing mention from Fitch. He explains that as alternatives neither inspires much conviction anymore. His own preference is for an economic democracy where workers participate directly in the running of the workplace as well as of the political machinery. To further this ideal, the industrial development policy of the city should use all of its resources, including contracts and bank loans, to encourage social ownership.

As Fitch recognizes, these proposals require planning. But he disavows centralized planning, whether by remote economic oligarchs or state bureaucrats. His model is one of democratic planning, fully participated in by and accountable to the people of the city whose lives are affected by such controls. It is a kind of governance about which we have everything to learn, including the issue of at what scale it is feasible.

If democratic planning is to have a chance there must be mobilizations of popular forces to create a kind of politics that does not now exist in New York. There are a few suggestions from Fitch, but once again a more sustained discussion about unions, political parties, and alliances would be helpful.

It is worth noting that Fitch does not believe that the forces he challenges are omnipotent. Indeed several cases are cited where they have been thwarted. A citizens group sparked by Jane Jacobs was instrumental in blocking the construction of the Lower Manhattan Expressway which undoubtedly would have destroyed thriving neighborhoods. To David Rockefeller, who championed this modernization, these were commercial slums which had the potential for becoming valuable real estate. Reference is also made to a still continuing battle by community activists including Marcy Benstock of the Clean Air Campaign to slow down if not yet finally bury a well-financed drive to build an elaborate new highway (Westway) and, incidentally, to grab and expand prime real estate along the Hudson, once more in the name of automobile traffic planning.

The Assassination of New York is a provocative addition to the literature on the control and fall of New York. It provides an urgent warning about some of the realities of much-celebrated post-industrial society. Some of the illustrations have been dissected by previ-

ous chroniclers.⁶ But they are worth recounting when placed within Fitch's framework and his findings on planning and development. At times the style shifts from academic to breezy, but the book is quite readable. Perhaps its most appealing quality is the old fashioned sense of indignation which pervades the analysis and the willingness to provoke dialogue on the requirements for a healthy economy and a democratic polity.

NOTES

1. Marshall Berman, "Building Our Judgment," *Ramparts*, March 1975.
2. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961.)
3. Bradford C. Snell, *The Industrial Reorganization Act*, Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Antitrust and Monopoly of the Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate, 93d Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, 1974, Parts 3, 4, and 4A, especially Mr. Snell's document "American Ground Transport" in Part 4A.
4. Robert Nichols, *From the Steam Room* (Gardiner, Maine: Tilbury House, 1993).
5. Lincoln Steffens, *The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1931).
6. Among many studies, see: Herbert Kaufman and Wallace S. Sayre, *Governing New York City* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1960); Paul Du Brul and Jack Newfield, *The Abuse of Power, The Permanent Government and the Fall of New York* (New York: Viking, 1977); Roger E. Alcala and David Mermelstein, ed. *The Fiscal Crisis of American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1977); William K. Tabb, *The Long Default* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1982).

According to the materialist concept of history, the ultimately determining element in history is the production of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase.—Friedrich Engels.

The Hormel Strike: Worker's Power, Business Unionism, and the Left

by Bruce Nissen

Peter Rachleff, *Hard Pressed in the Heartland: The Hormel Strike and the Future of the Labor Movement*. Boston: South End Press, 1993. 136 pp. \$12 paperback.

Hard Pressed in the Heartland is a well written and interesting account of one of the premier labor struggles of the 1980s, together with lessons the author draws from it and his predictions about the future of the U.S. labor movement. The book is short, concise, popularly written, and stimulating. It is bound to provoke a great deal of discussion and argument within socialist and progressive circles about the issues it raises.

From 1984 to 1987 a drama unfolded in the small town of Austin, Minnesota, which became national news. A 1,700-member union local, Local P-9 of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), engaged in a very public struggle with the Hormel meatpacking corporation. The centerpiece of that struggle was a 1985-1986 strike which was broken when the company reopened the plant using newly hired strikebreakers and P-9 members who crossed the picketline. Eventually P-9 was defeated, but not before massive solidarity efforts around the country were organized, accompanied by a major dispute between the union local and the national parent union.

Rachleff was an activist with the Local P-9 support committee in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. He is also a labor historian at Macalaster College in St. Paul. His account combines first-person

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narratives of his experiences with historical analyses of the evolution of the U.S. and local Austin labor movements. The result is highly readable and thought provoking. However, it is not entirely free of debatable assumptions and arguments.

The initial chapter is a very succinct analysis of the precipitous decline of the labor movement in the 1980s. Organized labor's current woes and the historical roots of this decline in the post-Second World War period are clearly presented. Union busting, plant closings, speed-up and stress, concession bargaining, loss of political power, and the like swept the nation. Why were the unions so ill-equipped to deal with the onslaught? In a remarkably short space, Rachleff answers by reviewing organized labor's history from the 1920s to the present, which is read as a battle between impulses toward a broadly social *movement* to empower workers generally and those tending toward a centralized and undemocratic "business unionism" with only the narrowest of aims.

Rachleff's critique of business unionism is a standard left view, and it is well put. My only quibble with his analysis at this point in the book concerns a possible exaggeration of the militancy, solidarity, and democracy of the 1930s CIO upsurge. In an essay "Not So Turbulent Years," historian Melvyn Dubofsky has demonstrated that the 1930s should not be seen through too rose-colored glasses. The bulk of the industrial workers were more pragmatic and cautious than some of us leftists would like to admit. The CIO upsurge was an amazing and positive event, but it does not aid our understanding of it to concentrate one-sidedly on its more radical manifestations. Doing so makes it difficult to explain how it could have been tamed as quickly and thoroughly as it was from 1938 on.

The book's second chapter relates the history of Local P-9's predecessor, the Independent Union of All Workers (IUAW). This was a remarkable union based in the Hormel plant from 1933 through 1937. It branched out and organized all types of workers in Austin and many nearby towns. From Rachleff's description of it, the IUAW was a somewhat modified version of the IWW, the famous "Wobblies."

The IUAW relied upon horizontal solidarity, rank-and-file militancy, and a philosophical outlook of class struggle for its effectiveness. In 1937 it was forced to affiliate with a national union as part of a strike settlement. Hormel workers joined the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee, which several transmigrations later became part of the UFCW. Other parts of the IUAW joined the Teamsters and other national unions.

Rachleff sees the IUAW as an important precursor to the militant P-9 struggle of the 1980s, although he admits that virtually all P-9 members were unaware of the earlier union. P-9ers took no conscious inspiration from the IUAW; it would have been interesting had Rachleff used his skills as an historian to attempt to trace what *were* the connections between these two union struggles separated by fifty years, if they weren't direct and conscious. Unfortunately, this slim volume doesn't address the question in any detail.

Chapters 3-5 tell the story of the P-9 struggle. Rachleff does a remarkably good job of telling a complex tale in a very short space. He briefly outlines the background in the late 1970s and early 1980s (younger, more militant leadership; company threats and demands for concessions; extremely dangerous and deteriorating working conditions, etc.), the struggle itself (a "corporate campaign" against the company and allied financial interests, a subsequent strike, massive outreach efforts, nationwide solidarity actions, etc.). The tale is well told, from the viewpoint of a strong supporter actively involved in the campaign.

Three targets particularly raise Rachleff's ire, beyond the usually repressive mechanisms of the state, the corporations, and the press. One is the international union:

UFCW president William Wynn and the National Packinghouse Director Lewie Anderson openly opposed the campaign against Hormel from the very start. . . . The UFCW leadership continued behind the scenes. . . to undermine the strike, with the frequent collusion of other labor leaders. The strike's character as "rank-and-file" vs. "leadership" was clear. And the willingness of the leadership to let P-9 lose (perhaps even their *desire* to let P-9 lose) was equally clear. (p. 82)

A second target is the Leninist left:

Many groups who claimed to be "supporting" P-9 frequently harmed or limited the struggle. There were some exceptions of course. The Fourth Internationalist Tendency and Socialist Action, in particular, offered some constructive help. But all too often, Leninist groups placed the furtherance of their own agendas and the confirmation of their theories ahead of the expansion of P-9's struggle for union democracy and an end to concessions. (p. 73)

Particularly harsh criticisms are levelled at the Communist Labor Party (CLP), the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), and the Communist Party (CP). The CP actually opposed the local union's struggle, while the other two gave "help" that Rachleff considered inappropriate.

A third target is Barbara Koppel, whose film on the P-9 struggle, *American Dream*, won an Academy Award. Rachleff writes:

This "critically acclaimed" movie has done something to the members of Local P-9 and their supporters that the Hormel Company, the United Food & Commercial Workers Union (UFCW), and the Minnesota National Guard could never do—turn them into "hapless victims." Granted, the P-9ers lost their strike, their jobs, and their union. But while they were victimized, they were never victims, something completely lost in Koppel's documentary. . .

American Dream actually implies that the UFCW had the "right" position—not to take on Hormel at all, or to return to work on the company's terms when they began to hire "permanent replacements"—at the same time it whitewashes the union's role in destroying a strike it publicly claimed to support. (pp. 4-5)

From these quotes alone, it should be apparent that the P-9 struggle raises strong, passionate differences among those who were closest to it. As one who travelled to Austin, Minnesota, for a rally and march in support of the P-9 struggle, I can see a lot of truth in a number of Rachleff's criticisms. However, I am not fully convinced that he sees (or has fully analyzed) the complete picture.

The most serious charges raised by P-9's opponents are largely unanswered in this book. They concern the strategic foresight of the P-9 leadership and their close consultant, Ray Rogers of Corporate Campaign, Inc., as well as the tactical wisdom and flexibility demonstrated by those in the leadership of the struggle. Opponents have also accused P-9 of pursuing "enterprise unionism" which ignored the rest of the industry and nationwide pattern bargaining. It may be that none of these criticisms is correct. For example, the "enterprise unionism" looks weak to me, in light of P-9's many efforts at outreach and solidarity. But these issues deserve serious consideration, which they do not receive in the book.

In hindsight, two questions in particular bother me. The "corporate campaign" against Hormel preceding the strike centered on pressuring First Bank Systems, Hormel's banker and largest stockholder, into severing ties with or pressuring Hormel. There is no evidence that First Bank was actually hurt by this campaign, or that it pressured Hormel. Ray Roger's belief that banks and insurance companies tied to an employer are virtually always strategically effective targets must be questioned, in light of this evidence.

Second, the tactical wisdom of doggedly pursuing the original course of action even as more and more circumstances turned against the local must be questioned. Sometimes a tactical retreat is the best way to keep your forces united for further struggle. For

example, had the local marched back into the plant singing “Solidarity Forever” at the point the company reopened the plant, they might have been in a better tactical position to fight, *from the inside*, than they were on the outside with strikebreakers (including many P-9 members) working inside.

I realize that all of this is second guessing, and hindsight usually beats foresight. Nevertheless, such questions must be raised if we are to learn from the experience, even as we pay tribute to P-9’s bravery and spirit. *Hard Pressed in the Heartland* does not address these issues.

The final chapter of the book presents an account of recent labor activism and an optimistic view of future developments. Rachleff succinctly presents service-sector organizing breakthroughs and activism, worker stirrings within the high-tech sector, white-collar activism, innovative organizations and campaigns such as Black Workers for Justice and Justice for Janitors, development of labor coalitions in some localities, a new “social unionism,” and the growth of labor-community coalitions, international labor solidarity work, an “organizing model” of unionism, development of Labor Party Advocates and increasing sentiments for a labor party, the increased use of the “corporate campaign” strategy, the spread of the “inside strategy” of “striking on the job,” and even a growing turn toward civil disobedience.

These are indeed the hopeful developments in the U.S. labor movement. Rachleff sees them as a harbinger of the future. He believes that an historical “leap” will occur whereby the existing labor movement is surpassed by new forms and struggles. Although I know about and appreciate all the changes he reviews, I am less convinced that they all add up to such qualitative change. However, Rachleff’s optimism is refreshing; progressive change always depends on widescale adoption of just such optimism.

I believe this book is useful to everyone interested in labor, left politics, and U.S. unions. It doesn’t answer all your questions, but it stimulates your thinking and provides a clearly articulated perspective. Much is said in a very short volume.

TRANSITION

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EXTR

(Continued from inside front cover.)

Is all this inevitable? Well, not quite. The politics of health-care reform are still in flux, and no one yet knows what the outcome will be. At this writing (early June) the Clinton plan looks to be in a lot of trouble, but so far none of the alternatives being considered in Washington shows signs of becoming a serious contender. Against this background, the wild card in the game is pretty obviously the single payer (Canadian-style) system which is largely ignored by the media but has all along enjoyed substantial support in the Congress. The situation is clearly unstable and at least potentially explosive.

One possibility, of course, is that things will calm down, leaving the status quo essentially unchanged. This is a recurring pattern in U.S. politics, not least in the health-care field. A few years ago, for example, Harris Wofford won an upset victory in a Pennsylvania senatorial race, stressing health-care reform as the dominant theme in his campaign. Many (ourselves included) thought this would touch off a bandwagon effect. But there was no follow-up, and nothing happened. A lot of people hope that this will happen again, and they may be right. But there are reasons why it may not, perhaps the most important of which is the drastic deterioration of the employment situation (both quantity and quality) in the early 1990s. Today, in addition to the 37 million or so workers who lack health insurance, there are many more millions whose employer-based protection is precarious and/or grossly inadequate. Another reason of course is that the Clinton administration, whatever you may think of its health-care plan, has at least raised the issue to the point where it is not likely to go away without some resolution. But now, as the 1994 elections begin to loom large on the horizon, there is another, much more specific reason why the health-care pot is likely to keep boiling. This is the apparent success of a grass-roots California campaign to put what is entitled the California Health Security Act on the November ballot in that state. This required the gathering by an all-volunteer effort of more than a million signatures. At press time we are informed that well over that figure have been collected, and that, barring unforeseen developments, the voters of California will have an opportunity to vote directly on an Act which, according to one of the volunteer campaign workers, "would establish a Canadian-style system [in California] that would eliminate the 1,500 insurance companies that generate millions of miles of red tape and hundreds of thousands of forms and never perform any medical service of any kind but manage to get away with 25 percent of the healthcare dollar, or \$250 billion a year." (*In These Times*, April 18, 1994, p. 6)

As soon as it is definite that the Act will be on the ballot in November, we can expect an all-out attack led by the multi-billion-dollar insurance industry and supported by all the other opponents of the single payer system. On the other side will be only the people who want a decent health-care reform, and understand that single payer is the only way they can get it. Unfortunately there is no political party to represent the people's interest, and most of the organizations they do have are local, multi-purpose, and underfunded. The volunteer signature-collecting campaign provides the framework of an organization to support the Act, and we understand that plans are afoot for a nationwide California Summer on the model of the Mississippi Summer of 1964: then the issue was civil rights, now it is health-care reform. The struggle in the present case, much more

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